Dianthus Barbatus

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Dianthus Barbatus

by sainthannibal

Summary

The man stared at Hannibal, eyes roaming over him before returning to recapture his gaze. Hannibal chose this moment to speak again.

“A late-night stroll has proved to be a useful activity to destress from the woes of my daily profession–”

“You’re dumpin’ a body in the bayou,” The man, Will, interrupted, his voice thick with the local cadence and accent. He glanced over Hannibal's shoulder at the bag.

“I figure this is an irrelevant detail,” Hannibal purred, like a cat flicking its tail around, eyes shining. Will continued to stare, his arm not wavering from his target. Hannibal raised his chin, casting his gaze to the ground behind Will. Will’s eyes drifted to the bag still slung over Hannibal’s shoulder. “It’d be a shame to kill me with a gun.” Will brought his focus back to Hannibal. “Very impersonal, let alone intimate.”

“You’ve done this before,” Will slowly let his arm fall to his side. “The offer still stand?”

or

Set 10 years before the start of the show, Will and Hannibal meet in the dead of night while dumping the bodies of their respective victims in the same place.

Русский

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

And The Crowd Goes Wild, What A Home Run!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After a thunderstorm, everything is greener. The smell of fresh rain permeates the air, only to be accompanied by silence. The wildlife are still hiding, wondering if it was safe to emerge from wherever they had managed to find shelter. During a storm, there are no predators or prey. Trees are struck down, rivers overflow and flood, and lightning could easily set everything aflame. All are put on an equal playing field, forced to wait restlessly until the violent weather passes. Yet,

destruction manages to beget new life. The vegetation is vibrant with new life that had been breathed into it by Her fatal kiss. In nature, violence and unpredictability end in beauty. This is the original Renaissance.

The bayou was a quiet place after a storm like this one. Clouds still loomed in the sky, impeding the luminescence of the rising full moon from illuminating the bayou as dusk arrived. However, one of the clouds began to divorce itself from another, allowing the brilliance of the moon to shine through. The light beamed when it reflected off of a head of slicked back, dark hair. Some of the hair had fallen in front of a face of sharp angles, grazing the thin bridge of his sculpted nose and strong brow-line. His eyes were the color of burnt sienna, but detached. As the clouds continued to part, more light fell upon the man, reflecting off of the plastic suit that covered his entire body and the linen suit underneath that clothed him.

Hannibal stared ahead, catching sight of water, the broadening moonlight flickering playfully off of the current. There was no crunch of tree litter. The leaves were softened and silenced by the rain of the storm. The squelch of mud under his plastic-covered dress shoes was the only sound he made, but it was slowly drowned out by the brave cicadas that had begun to buzz. Occasionally, the corners of his thin lips would twitch or his brows would crease slightly, but the rest of his face remained an apathetic gaze.

The vegetation began to thin the closer Hannibal grew to the bank of the water. Less plant root systems meant more loose mud. Hannibal glanced down at the bag he carried, hoisting it higher so it was not touching the ground. He threw it over his shoulder, his nose twitching as he caught a whiff of its contents. He licked at the corner of his mouth. He let his eyes shut and threw his head back, a small smile gracing his lips. He hummed softly and his eyes opened once more. He could see the rushing water of the freshly flooded river, the moonlight glimmering off of the brown water. He proceeded into the clearing in long strides despite the deep mud and large bag, maintaining an air of elegance. There was a man on his knees on the bank of the river, leaning over a lump and bathed in the light of the full moon. Hannibal stopped, his feet sinking into the mud as he stood.

Dark-brown curls wet with sweat and rain water clung to the nape of the other man's tanned neck, tangled from the arduous work under the cover of the night. The back of his worn flannel button-down was dark with sweat. His back and torso flexed, twisting as he raised an arm up in the air, rolled up sleeves revealing heavily tanned forearms dusted with dark hair. The insides of his wrists dented as his grip tightened on the handle of a hatchet. A cloud passed over the moon, encasing everything in darkness as the man brought down the hatchet with a grunt.

There was a muffled thud followed by a squishing noise. In the darkness, Hannibal quirked the corner of his lips. He continued to watch in silence. As quickly as it had arrived, the cloud floated on by, releasing the moonlight to illuminate the man on the bank once again. His hand came up to rub the shoulder of his hatchet arm. He pressed deeply into the muscle of his shoulder and rolled it a couple times. His breath was heavy. He moaned as he massaged the meat of his shoulder. Hannibal slightly tilted his head as he watched. The man's back and torso soon twisted again as he brought the hatchet up again over his head. The blade was clear in the light of the moon, glistening and wet with blood.

"You look like a man in need of assistance," The man's arm fell down to his side. He did not drop the hatchet. He pushed himself off of his knees and onto his feet. He stood facing the water for a moment. A warm breeze blew downstream. The man, Will, twirled around to face Hannibal, in one hand at his side was the hatchet. In his other was a pistol, pointed straight at Hannibal's face. A blinding flash of lightning shot across the sky above them.

Hannibal blinked at the barrel pointed at his face. He looked at the hands that oil had stained black, revealing every line on his palms and fingers. It had seeped into his cuticles, painting them black and accentuating the shape of his short, blunt nails. He looked at Will's mostly clean shaven face. The stubble aided his head of curls to frame his cheeks and jawline. His eyes were like shards of sea glass. They bore into Hannibal's that were like cinnabar in the light. The man stared at Hannibal, eyes roaming over him before returning to recapture his gaze. Hannibal chose this moment to speak again.

"A late-night stroll has proved to be a useful activity to de-stress from the woes of my daily profession–"

"You're dumpin' a body in the bayou," The man, Will, interrupted, his voice thick with the local cadence and accent. He glanced over Hannibal's shoulder at the bag.

"I figure this is an irrelevant detail," Hannibal purred, like a cat flicking its tail around, eyes shining. Will continued to stare, his arm not wavering from his target. Hannibal raised his chin, casting his gaze to the ground behind Will. Will's eyes drifted to the bag still slung over Hannibal's shoulder. "It'd be a shame to kill me with a gun." Will brought his focus back to Hannibal. "Very impersonal, let alone intimate."

"You've done this before," Will slowly let his arm fall to his side. "The offer still stand?" Will pivoted to the side, gesturing to the corpse behind him. It was mutilated. Limbs had been amputated, joints twisted to unnatural positions, blood painting the body black in the moonlight. Hannibal plodded through the mud towards the body. While he gently set down his bag, Will turned to face his current project. He glanced towards Hannibal, taking a step back, gesturing for him to take a look. As Hannibal looked down over Will's mess, his hair fell over his shining eyes. Will loomed close over his shoulder, watching intently. The metal was cool in Will's sweaty palm.

"Beautiful," Hannibal praised. Will lifted his gun. "Even in death."

"It is beautiful, ain't it?" Will smacked Hannibal in the head with the butt of his gun.

At such an angle, Hannibal did not fall unconscious, but he did stumble, trying to gather his composure. He staggered for a moment before lurching at Will, his hands reaching for his throat. Swallowing deeply, Will scrambled backwards.

"Too fuckin' tall…" Will cursed and threw his gun aside. He gripped the hatchet with two hands, letting Hannibal get closer. Hannibal's fingers brushed his neck. Will's back and torso twisted, arms high over his side conjuring all the force he had in his body, and he swung, smacking Hannibal's head with the blunt edge of the blade.

"And the crowd goes wild," Hannibal fell to the ground, limp. Will smirked through his heavy breathing, "What a home run!"

The moon loomed high in the sky. The humidity had returned to suffocating levels and the bugs started to sing their song of off-key chirping and incessant buzzing. A mouse scurried along the dirt and gravel road, chasing and catching a tree nut that had just fallen. Satisfied, the mouse sat in the

road, nibbling on its conquest. Not soon after a couple of bites, the ground began to rumble under the mouse's tiny paws. Headlights beamed over the horizon. The mouse took another bite. The rumble of the engine grew louder. Closer. The mouse did not move. The truck tumbled down the road. The mouse saw the tires directly headed towards him, but continued to nibble. The tree nut was too delicious to put down.

Will inhaled sharply, slamming the breaks as a hawk swooped down in front of the truck, snatching something in its claws and speeding off into the dark of the night.

"Damn bird," He cursed, steadily letting off the brake pedal. He glanced in the rear-view mirror, eyes briefly passing over the lump laying in the backseat to look out the back window. He set his eyes back on the road and accelerated, listening to the familiar crackling of the tires rolling across the gravel. He drove down the road until it became narrower and the gravel thinned until it was just a beaten path, surrounded by a forest of oak and cypress trees. Will stared at the road in front of him with eyes that had started to burn. One hand fell from the wheel to clutch his pant leg, tired eyes blinking up into the rear-view mirror again. He tugged at the fabric, pinching and pulling it until he came upon a familiar spot, slowing the car and making a turn.

The driveway was more grass than dirt, the beaten earth only where a car's tires had consistently worn away at whatever had been there before. The truck rolled down the path for a few minutes until Will finally caught sight of a cabin. The headlights shone on the door. Will could see a canine silhouette and the movement that could only be from a wagging tail. The truck slowed to a stop right in front of the door. Will rubbed his face and eyes, running them up and through his hair. His hand then found the car keys. He turned off the car and unlocked the doors.

Stepping out of the car, Will immediately went for the backseat. He grabbed Hannibal's feet and heaved his motionless body out of the car and threw his long frame over his shoulder, holding him by his muscular thighs. The plastic of his suit stuck to the bare skin of Will's neck. Will huffed and tried to adjust, but only hissed as the plastic ripped away. He kicked his foot out to shut the car door and brought Hannibal inside the cabin.

Will came back outside, the door creaking as it shut behind him. He took a moment to glance up at the sky. The clouds had finally dissipated into the night and he could see the constellations. Will's gaze softened as he watched for a small moment before placing a hand on the door handle. Opening the front door of the car, he got back into the driver's seat and put the key in the ignition. He turned the wheel to the side, car lights revealing more than enough room in the overgrown lawn for a car to pass through. He guided the car into the back, towing a Bentley into the backyard, falling once again under the comforting blanket of the dark.

The blinds were broken, stuck at a half-shut angle, allowing slivers of sunlight to pour through the gaps and illuminate the dust coating the blinds and the windowsill. The streams of light poured over the long figure underneath the plaid comforter whose feet stuck out over the edge of the bed. The door to the room was ajar. The room itself was rather plain. The walls were an offwhite. A nightstand with a single drawer sat next to the full size bed with a lamp, an alarm clock, and a

softcover book on top of it. On the opposite side of the bed was a chair piled with extra blankets and towels. The room smelled of sweat, oak wood, and dogs.

The door squeaked, opening slowly from the other side, followed by the sound of panting and metal tags jingling. A dog with tan fur speckled with brown markings trotted into the room, finding the face of the person lying on the bed. The dog, whose name tag read *Winston* , shoved his cold nose into Hannibal's face, his tail wagging like a metronome, hitting Hannibal's hip constantly without missing a beat. Hannibal's brow furrowed and he pulled his head backwards, away from the edge of the bed. Winston, ever persistent, jumped up and placed his front paws on the mattress, licking Hannibal's face. Hannibal finally opened his eyes and Winston immediately retreated through the open door, galloping into the other room. Hannibal brought his palm to press against his brow bone and applied pressure to it. With a heavy breath, he uncovered himself, staring down at his clothes.

He was still in the linen suit, but his plastic bodysuit was gone. He threw his legs over the edge and pressed his head into his hands for a few moments before standing up. He stumbled at the first attempt, his hand shooting out to grab onto the bed to steady himself. He took another heavy breath and looked around the room. He eyed the lamp on the nightstand, but instead reached for the drawer. He opened it quietly, rummaging through dog brushes, loose change, and nuts and bolts. His search ended finally when he removed his hand from the drawer holding a pen. Satisfied, he closed the drawer just as quietly and padded towards the open door, not bothering to look for his shoes.

Hannibal entered into what appeared to be a living room. The floor was littered with occupied dog beds and the blanket covering the couch had a thin layer of dog hair. None of the dogs spooked or barked at him. They stared, some coming up to sniff at his feet before deciding lying down was a better idea. There was a box television propped on an unfinished, oak wood coffee table. The news anchors quietly chattered away about events they deemed worthy of media coverage. Straight ahead was the kitchen, visible by the open layout of the house. A figure stood in front of the countertop, his back once again towards Hannibal. He tightened his grip on the pen and stalked closer.

"Mornin' sunshine!" This time, Hannibal was the one to stop dead in his tracks. "Congratulations, you didn't die," Will's curls bounced as he turned on his heel. He smiled, the creases under his eyes deepening. He held a bowl of cereal in his hand. " *Yet* ."

Chapter End Notes

Does this qualify as a cliffhanger? Whoops.

Thanks for reading, kudos, and comments! Hope you choose to stick around for next time!

Let me know what you think!

I Kill People Like You

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the support! Stick around for some extra notes at the end. For now, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Y'ain't gonna stand there all day, are you?" Will gestured for Hannibal to take the bowl of cereal. "Eat." Will leaned against the counter. Hannibal toed over to the space beside his unexpected host, sliding the pen he took from the bedroom into his breast pocket. His sock-clad feet did not make a sound on the tile that chilled his heels, even through the fabric. He eyed the cereal, a brow raising minutely as he looked at it. It was a movement so small it was not noticeable to most people. Will Graham was not most people.

"Not a fan of cereal? There's a mulberry tree out round back, you might have to fight the birds, if you're willin'," Will deadpanned. He pushed the bowl against Hannibal's chest, milk sloshing around the bowl. "I said *eat* ," Hannibal's lip twitched, but he took the bowl with an elegant touch. He brought the bowl to his nose and smelled its contents.

Will turned his back to the other, reaching to open one of the kitchen cabinets. While Will began to prepare his own bowl, Hannibal pushed the cereal around in the milk. He brought a spoonful up to his lips, inhaling deeply. He let his eyes flutter shut, as if he was trying to conjure a different image of what was in his hands. Will buzzed around the kitchen without making a sound. Hannibal opened his mouth, tongue wrinkling in his mouth at the mushy texture of the cereal and the room temperature milk. He set the spoon back in the bowl, but he did not set the bowl down. That would be rude.

The sound of a knife hitting a cutting board made Hannibal's ears twitch, distracting him from the awful textures on his tongue. He looked up away from the depressing bowl of cereal, the sweet smell of strawberries embracing him. Will stood, hips leaning forward, pressing into the countertop. Hannibal gazed at him, bathed in the harsh fluorescent lighting of the kitchen. The white short sleeve shirt Will wore was thin and hung loosely over his form. His workman's pants were the same as the night before, painted with splotches of mud and splatter of dried blood. He seemed unbothered by his bare feet on the freezing tile floor.

"What's the matter?" The knife did not hit the cutting board. "Cat gotcha' tongue?" Hannibal watched Will's shoulder twitch. His eyes gleamed. The viper chose to strike.

"That must have been quite painful. To generate enough force to knock a grown man unconscious is a weary task. Even without the burden of a rotator cuff injury," Will bellowed with laughter in one moment and in the next, Hannibal found himself catching Will's wrist in an iron grip, a sharp point pressing against his trachea. Hannibal inhaled. The knife smelled like fresh fruit.

"Who the hell are you," Will snarled, "And who the *fuck* sent you?" Hannibal smiled with a closed mouth. The mongoose had chosen to retaliate.

“How rude of a host to accost his guest.” Hannibal raised a finger to the blade, running it from the hilt to where it pressed against his throat. “In less than 12 hours, you have made two attempts on my life.” He brought his finger to his mouth, sucking the juice off of it. “If I may, the strawberries are still a smidge too tart. I would suggest letting them ripen in the open air.” Will pressed the knife harder. Blood began to bloom, beading at the wound. Hannibal blinked.

“I asked you a question,” Will hissed, his eyes darkening, pupils blown wide. A sharp whistle sounded from his lips. There was a rush of clattering against the tile floor, a chorus of growls and the heady scent of dogs invaded the air in the kitchen.

“I would never stoop to the level of incompetency of my colleagues who are not capable of noticing and identifying such injuries.” Hannibal watched the gears turned in Will’s head. “Based on your reaction and the behavior of your,” Hannibal calmly glanced down around them, counting three dogs with their hackles raised, “ *pack* , I have correctly diagnosed you.”

“Gotta say, *Doc* ,” Hannibal sneered. “Can’t convince me you’re better than them. They might not know about your extracurriculars.” Will leaned in, his lips brushing Hannibal’s ear as he whispered. “ *But, I do* ,” Will raked the tip of the blade down Hannibal’s clothed chest. “And I kill people like you.”

“And yet, you haven’t,” Still only inches apart, Hannibal gazed down at him. “How curious.” The television played in the background, the noise faintly wafting into the kitchen. Will’s warm breath tickled Hannibal’s cheek with every heavy exhale. His eyes did not meet Hannibal’s. Will’s fingers twitched as he pushed the knife against Hannibal’s sternum, watching intently as it cut through the fabric. Hannibal exhaled through his nose, his hand reaching to cover the hand wielding the knife. A chorus of growling and snarling surrounded them. Will pulled away.

“Arrêtez-vous!” The dogs quieted immediately, licking their chops as if nothing had happened. One even sat and looked up at Hannibal with wide, cute eyes. With the knife still in hand, Will stepped towards the back door in the kitchen, brushing Hannibal’s shoulder with his own as he passed. He opened the door and slid open the screen. Hannibal turned half-way to watch him. "Y’all go on outside." The dogs whizzed past Will in a blur. “You’d best eat some of them berries, tart or not.” Will let the screen door slam shut behind him, taking a few steps off of the porch as he watched the dogs tumble around in the yard.

Hannibal glanced at the cutting board of sliced fruit, but the murmuring from the TV caught his attention, now the only noise in the house apart from his breathing. And the sound of the blood pumping behind his ears, rushing south to his trousers. He smoothed his hands down the front of his suit jacket, finding the buttons. As he walked over to the living room, he unbuttoned the ruined jacket, now stained red and frayed where the knife had cut into it. He took the pen from his breast pocket and slipped it into his slacks. He then took off the jacket and neatly draped over the backrest of the couch. The TV blared the obnoxious music that trumpeted, signaling the start of a news segment.

“Around 7 o’clock this morning, a volunteer of Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge discovered two dead bodies in the Atchafalaya River.” The news anchor was turning a pale shade of green, poorly concealed by a full face of heavy makeup. She pressed on, concealing her disgust and horror in favor of pushing on for the sake of her job. *“As of current, authorities have identified these murders to have been victims of the Baton Rouge Rougarou.”* Hannibal turned his head, looking out the screen door. His smile was warm.

"Authorities urge everyone to take extra precautions and be vigilant. Here to speak with us today about what has been deemed to be grave escalation in the Rougarou murders is Captain Poirier–" Hannibal quickly shut off the television when the screen door squeaked open, soon slamming against the frame as it shut.

"Watchin' TV can't be good for that head of yours. I'm supposed to be playin' nurse to the great Doctor?" The knife clattered against the stainless steel of the kitchen sink.

"Lecter. Dr. Hannibal Lecter," Hannibal turned to find Will sauntering out of the kitchen.

"Now, Dr. Lecter, given your expertise, wouldn't you suppose a television screen ain't good for your bad head?" Will sat on the arm of the couch.

"My head is just fine, thank you. In fact, my nurse," He paused.

"Will,"

"--Is the one who nearly gave me a concussion."

"I kept you alive, didn't I?" Hannibal huffed a laugh, a smile growing on his lips.

"I hate to be discourteous to such a generous host, but I must return to retrieve my belongings. It'd be a shame to leave a charitable clue to the authorities."

"Well, you're in luck, sha. This ain't my first song and dance," Hannibal blinked. "Allons, come see," Will opened the screen door again and took a couple steps onto the patio. He beckoned Hannibal to follow, holding the door open. Hannibal glanced at the leaves and dirt scattered on the patio floor.

"I'm afraid that the nursing staff has misplaced my belongings, among those being my shoes," The sound of a scoff was followed by the thunk of a pair of old work boots as they landed in front of Hannibal's feet.

"Just take those," Hannibal watched as Will shoved his feet into boots that were identical to the ones he had just thrown. "They'll do just fine," Hannibal's lip twitched. Even so, he delicately slid his feet into the boots and stepped outside. By the time Hannibal had finished tying his laces into perfect bows, Will was already down the steps and headed towards a wooden barn that sat a couple hundred feet behind the house. Stepping down the patio steps, the unmerciful sun bathed Hannibal in a humid heat. He followed him to the front of the barn, but stood in front of the open doors, merely peering through them. The morning light illuminated the large open space, but was chased out when the light inside flickered on, blanketing everything in a yellow light.

The entire barn was cluttered, the beaten dirt ground littered with scrap metal, toolboxes, and rusting car engines. In the back left corner behind a support beam sat a small boat with its propeller sitting on the ground in multiple pieces, surrounded by wrenches, screwdrivers, nuts and bolts. In the corner opposite was a couple of car doors and tires, propped up against a large freezer that was gray with dirt and age. Red gas cans and oil barrels were in every corner of the barn turned workshop. Tools that did not litter the floor near their current projects were hung up across the left wall. Saws, hammers, pliers and more hung on hooks. The wall opposite only had fishing rods hung, underneath it a table messy with fish hooks in various states of completion.

In the center of the barn, a black Bentley was hooked up to a red Ford, rusted and dented with age, parked with its nose up against the back wall of the barn. Will sat on top of the hood of the Bentley, which faced the entrance of the barn. Will spread his arms out in a mockery of a welcoming gesture.

“You’re in luck, I cleaned up your mess for you. Think of it as a one-time deal. You take a hit to the head and in return, you ain’t gotta worry about the garbage disposal,”

Hannibal watched Will as he spoke with owlish eyes and nodded once, standing tall with his hands clasped in front, wrists pressed against where the edge of his linen slacks rested at his hips.

“I thank you for your courteous gesture,” He did not step into the barn. Will, however, pushed himself onto his feet and ambled past the driver’s side of the car, walking towards the freezer.

“Please,” Will called over his shoulder, “I wouldn’t kill you on my property. Not my style,” As Will turned back to walk deeper towards the back of the barn, Hannibal entered. A wicked smile graced his lips and the pen in his pocket hit his leg reassuringly as he stalked after one Will Graham.

“And if it is mine, William?”

“Authorities urge everyone to take extra precautions and be vigilant. Here to speak with us today about what has been deemed to be a grave escalation in the Rougarou murders is Captain Poirier–”

Captain Cassandra Poirier of the Baton Rouge Police Department switched off the television in her office before the televised version of herself could begin relating the statement she had already given earlier that morning to the press. Rubbing the back of her neck, she grabbed the case file sitting on her desk and headed for the door to her office. She rolled her neck around, feeling relief with each pop and opened the door.

The entire precinct was a mess. Phones rang every few seconds with not enough staff to answer them all. Officers ushered in suspects who yelled, cried, and vomited. Two of which had done all three already that morning. The television in the precinct was tuned into the local news channel. Captain Poirier watched herself on the screen. She watched as her hooded eyes began to droop with exhaustion, her fingers drumming on the podium as she gave her address to the public and press. Her thick braid of graying black hair was slick and without flyaways earlier that morning. She glanced down at the corner of the TV, catching the time. *11:34 A.M.*

“Turn that thing off, we’ve got work to do!” She barked, marching towards one of the conference rooms. As she entered, through the glass wall, she caught a glimpse of the TV switching off. She dropped the folder on the table and flipped it open. A thick stack of pictures sat atop an even thicker stack of paperwork.

With a clenched jaw, Captain Poirier reached for the stack of photos. She swallowed thickly as she spread them out on the table. She looked up and straight ahead at the evidence board across the width of the table. She took a deep breath, her stomach expanding and then deflating. Her shoulder

fell a little looser. She rolled her neck, cracking it again. She took another deep breath and on the exhale, she reached for the bowl thumbtacks in the center of the table.

She leaned in, wrists facing inwards as she looked down at the new photos and then up at the past victims. The board was starting to get cluttered. At the top was a clipping from a local newspaper. In thick black ink, the block letters read:

BATON ROUGE ROUGAROU

Four mugshots were pinned to the board, each next to a corresponding image of their mutilated corpse. A map of Southern Louisiana was pinned to the center, thumbtacks of different colors indicating where the victim lived and where they were found.

Always taken during the night.

Always found miles away from where they were last seen.

Always found floating in the bayou during the night of the full moon. Captain Poirier looked back down at the photos and the paperwork in the folder.

“What were your crimes?” She pulled out the first vicitm’s identification. Unsurprisingly, another mugshot. She skimmed over his record.

“Child abuse, animal abuse, assault. Released on parole, March 2003,” Captain Poirier murmured, “Just a couple months ago.” She tapped the table with the nail of her index finger. “Christ.” Captain Poirier made her way around the table with the first victim’s information and crime scene photos. Somehow finding room on the board, she began to pin everything up. As she put up the photos, she stared at the corpse for the sixth time that day.

One of the man’s hands had been cut off, but the other was only severed, attached only by inches of fat and flesh. Both were wounds made by a dull blade and a forceful hand. They had discovered a bloody mouth and a bag of his teeth in his zipped jacket pocket. One of his knees had been bashed in and his chest mauled as if something had clawed it open. Chunks of his flesh and muscle had been missing from all over his body, from calves, thighs, torso, and neck. His severed hand was shoved down his throat.

Captain Poirier swallowed the bile that had risen in her throat. She quickly hung up the last of the pictures and then turned, sliding the folder closer to her. Taking out the identification of the second victim, she paused. Her face pinched in confusion, her narrow eyes squinting.

“What did you do?” She flipped through the paperwork, but there was no other mugshot nor another criminal record. The sound of shuffling paper echoed as she emptied the entire folder, paperwork now spread out over the table. Captain Poirier shook her head. She reached for the pictures of the other victim’s corpse. Cassandra Poirier’s heart skipped a beat in her chest as she processed what she saw in front of her. She raised one picture straight in front of her, directly comparing it with the evidence board. With a quiet, breathless voice, she whispered in the quiet of the room.

“There’s another one.” She bolted for the door of the conference room, shoving it open. The blaring noise of the busy precinct hit her in the face, but Captain Cassandra Poirier was louder.

“Someone get me Officer Will Graham’s file, *NOW* !”

The freezer door peeled open, a puff of frigid air releasing into the humidity of the barn. Will hummed as the air hit his arm that held it open and upright.

“An odd choice of trophies, I must say,” Will reached inside, unzipping the soft duffel bag Hannibal carried the night before. Yanking open the bag, Will glanced down at two severed legs that had been cut from the top of the thigh. He turned to look towards the barn doors, only to find himself face to face with the good doctor. Will inhaled sharply through his mouth as his eyes caught a glimpse of Hannibal’s. Will Graham did not breathe as he stared into the cold abyss that was Hannibal Lecter’s eyes. His body stood rigid, as frozen as the human legs in the freezer.

Hannibal stared down at him. His eyes wrinkled around the edges as the corner of his lips perked upwards.

“The first time you allow yourself to make eye-contact is a moment of panic,” Hannibal leaned infinitesimally closer and his nostrils flared. He blinked slowly, savoring the aroma. “A moment of discomfort,”

“Hell, maybe you should take up psychiatry, Doc,” Will snapped, eyes flitting away quickly. “You’d make a killin’,”

With practiced ease and a maintained air of elegance, Hannibal twisted his fist in the front of Will’s shirt and wrenched him away from the freezer, slamming him against the closest support beam. Will’s body twisted against the wood, splinters falling to the ground and catching his back, piercing through the thin cotton of his shirt. Hannibal’s forearm held firm, pressing harder into Will’s chest, the pen clenched in his hand poised to pierce through his neck and into his jugular. A large hand cupped the back of Will’s neck, a thumb brushing over the cheekbone of his wincing face. With their noses barely touching, he had no choice but to look him in the eye. Will stared, eyes widening.

“Your eyes are hollow. You won’t kill–” Will’s phone began to ring. Ignoring his comment, Hannibal reached into Will’s pocket with his free hand. As he gaped, Will stood frozen, pupils blown wide. Hannibal glanced at the caller ID.

Capt. C. Poirer

“Answer her calmly,” Hannibal ordered, pressing the tip of the pen harder into Will’s neck, promising his threat. He then flipped open the phone and accepted the call on speaker, prompting Will to speak.

“He-” Will grunted, clearing his throat, “Hello?”

“Will Graham! I hope you’re doing well. I hate to bother you so soon after your injury. I know you’re taking time off, but the Rougarou cases have become all hands on deck,”

“Right now isn’t a… great time, Cas,” A heavy sigh over the phone.

“Look, if I’m honest, I have a feeling this is bigger than just the Rougarou. I looked at the case files from last night.” A pause, then a quiet voice. “Somethin’ ain’t adding up. Lord, it might be another

killer on the loose. So help me God if this is an inspired copycat." At this, Hannibal raised a brow, but nothing else. Will licked his lips, then mouthed a single word.

Offended? Hannibal's palm flexed tighter around the pen. Will ignored this, responding dutifully.

"I'll be there soon," Hannibal shut the phone. The tip of the pen did not leave Will's throat. He smirked, his eyes no longer wide in revelation.

"You won't kill me." Will's finger jabbed into Hannibal's chest. "As humans, we want to be understood. We yearn to be seen, setting up windows in our eyes to see if anyone who passes by will finally find us. See us. Understand us. You've boarded yours up and hollowed out your eyes. If you were going to kill me, you've had multiple chances already." Hannibal's eyes burned with resentful intrigue, his brow twitching as it refused to furrow.

"And yet, *you* haven't." Will's teeth flashed as he grinned cheekily. "Last night, you *chose* to watch me instead of doing what you do best. If I was anyone else, I'd be dead and my arms would be in that bag. Ponder that Doc. Seems I have to go deal with your mess. This time I'll be charging you," Will nudged Hannibal's foot with his own. "Go on, now," Hannibal backed away, letting him up from the beam.

"And besides, if I hadn't made it to the precinct, she'd have come lookin'," Will let out a sharp whistle. Hannibal watched the dogs run past the open barn doors, barreling towards the house. Will turned to the cars, crouching to unhook the Bentley from the Ford.

"I've allowed you to see me," Hannibal began, "In doing so, you have allowed me to see you. May I propose instead of windows, you imagine glass houses. Tell me, Will, are you the man living inside or are you the man throwing stones?"

Will did not respond, embracing the comfort of the silence that consumed them.

Chapter End Notes

Surprise! Will has not technically resigned from law enforcement.
For reference, I am going off of their ages from the show and subtracting 10 years. So, in this fic Will starts at age 28 and Hannibal at age 39. And for Captain Cassandra Poirier, she starts at age 51. Enjoy her character ;)
Thank you for your kudos, bookmarks, and comments! All your words have been so kind, they genuinely warm my heart.
See you next Tuesday!

A Beer Marinated Roast Would Have Been Quite Lovely

Chapter Notes

Welcome back!

Another week, another chapter.

As always, thank you for your support and enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Skilled hands worked to separate the two vehicles in the center of the barn, untying the wheel straps. Will groaned as he pushed himself back onto his feet. Shoving a hand in his pocket, Will fished for the keys to the Bentley. He threw the key ring over his middle finger and disappeared behind his truck. Hannibal trailed a hand across the fishing workbench, marveling at the variety of rods that hung from the ceiling and the wall.

“I kill people like you,” Hannibal did not turn to look at Will, enraptured by the setup of equipment. “This is what you said to me,”

“I think I’d remember considerin’ I said that an hour ago,” Will grunted, emerging from behind the truck, having changed into a pair of pants that were not muddy or blood-stained. He opened the door of the Bentley, and climbed in. He left the door open. The engine roared to life but fell to a quiet hum. The car inched off of the dolly, rolling off of it.

“And who would those people be?” Hannibal ran his finger across the table. There was no dust.

“You murdered a man in cold blood,” Will parked the Bentley a little ways outside the doors to the barn.

“And you did not?” Seemingly unbothered, Hannibal's hand continued to skitter across the desk, finding a fishing hook.

“That’s different,”

“You are a fisherman, Will.” Hannibal picked up the hook. “Fishermen are hunters with a niche interest,” He inspected it.

“Some hunters kill to survive. To feed their families. To keep others safe from wild animals.” Will yelled over the hum of the car engine. He shut it off and got out, standing at the entrance to the barn.

“All hunters take pleasure in killing. No matter if it is a morsel smaller than a grain of sand or if that enjoyment is an all-consuming black-hole, the hunter begging whomever they believe to be God to release them to the mercy of their hedonistic tendencies,”

"I don't," Will got out of the car and slammed the door shut. He locked the doors.

"You kill out of pure obligation, then?" Hannibal pressed the pad of his thumb against the tip of the point. Blood pushed through the pinhole in his finger.

“Don’t touch that,” Will snipped. Hannibal brought his thumb to his mouth, tasting his blood. Will shook his head with a scoff. His tanned skin had already begun to weep under the rays of the sun, the fat rays growing harsher as the sun climbed ever higher in the cloudless sky.

“Unbelievable,” Hannibal set down the fish hook as Will groveled. In one fluid movement, he turned on his heel and took a step. He approached Will at the front of the barn.

"I suspect I shall be taking my leave now, as you must take yours. I must thank you for your generosity as a host and for the courtesy of not killing me," Will laughed, his hand landing on his stomach as he bellowed.

"Oh, you thought I'd let you leave?" Will held the keys in front of his face, jingling them. "Ain’t gonna happen yet. I'll be back before supper," Hannibal's keys clinked as Will pocketed them, "You, darlin', are staying here for now. I just needed to grab my truck," Will turned and patted Hannibal's shoulder, shooting him a wink. He disappeared into the barn, exiting a beat later in the driver's seat of his own vehicle. The truck rolled over towards the path to the front of the house.

"And Doctor Lecter," Will's arm hung outside the truck, his cheap button up wrinkling as he pressed his ribs against the open window. "Ursus americanus luteolus. The Louisiana black bear," His drawl was heavy, "We got a lot of them 'round here. Best of luck if you do try to leave," With that, Will's car puttered down grass barren ground.

Hannibal watched as the old red truck rumbled down the path, disappearing down the road. He let out a deep exhale and turned back to the barn. He headed towards the freezer in the back and opened it once more. He inhaled deeply and stared at the human legs in the open duffel bag.

"A nice roast shall suffice," Zipping up the bag and plucking it from the freezer, Hannibal began to close the lid. When it was halfway shut, he pushed the door back open, having spotted something else. He gently set the bag next to his feet and leaned into the freezer. With one hand propping the door open, Hannibal carefully dug through the rest of the freezer's contents. His rummaging paused suddenly, a toothy smile forming on his lips.

"What a busy hunter you have been," Hannibal pulled out a freezer bag, vacuum sealed shut. He pulled out five more. He placed them all on top of his own duffel bag. Finally done, he shut the freezer and turned to put Will's vacuum sealed meats inside his bag, resting on top of the plastic-wrapped legs like ice-packs. The bag now resealed and secure, Hannibal set foot for the house. The dogs were still gathered on the porch, sitting quietly except for the occasional yip. Stepping onto the front porch, the dogs began to whine, their eyes wide and begging.

Opening the front porch, Hannibal slid the shoes off of his feet before walking into the house. He bent down, tidying the shoes so they were right next to each other, neatly tucked against the edge of the porch mat and the wall of the house. A bombardment of wagging tails and shedding coats followed him in, tumbling over each other and his own feet. Hannibal raised his hands slowly, letting the dogs sniff his hands before he made his way inside the kitchen.

The dogs began to bark excitedly, running towards their food bowls, tails whipping the air. One had stayed at Hannibal's feet, however, snuffling at the bag. Quirking a brow, Hannibal slung the bag over his shoulder like he had the night before, not allowing the dogs to touch the bag. That would be unsanitary.

Hannibal approached the pack slowly, one foot in front of the other. He crouched to the dogs' level steadily and reached for their bowls. This only had the opposite effect, as the dogs only barked louder and skittered around each other and under Hannibal's feet. Snatching one of the bowls, he brought it near his nose and inhaled. Hannibal's eyes blinked open, eyes wide in recognition. His stomach threatened to growl.

“Naughty boy,” Hannibal whispered. He set the bowl down and began to canvas the house. A picture frame sat on a bookshelf with a thin layer of dust. It held a picture of Will Graham as a young teenager standing on a boat with an older man. They shared the same mop of curly brown hair. Behind the picture sat books ranging from time of death articles to a collection of fish identification encyclopedias. Sticky notes littered the pages, stuffing the book full of annotations marked by chicken scratch handwriting. Long fingers ran across the sticky notes that littered the pages, revealing annotations marked by chicken scratch handwriting. Taking his hand away from the books, Hannibal made his way to the small desk in the corner of the room, shoved up against the wall next to the television stand. Opening the drawers, he started to rummage through the files. Upset, he found nothing of use. To his disappointment, he found nothing of importance, nor of legal standing. All the files were cleaned out, each drawer empty except for envelopes and blank paper.

"Clever too," Grabbing a piece of paper and an envelope, Hannibal took the pen he stole in hands for the third time that day, but the first time he intended to write with it.

When finished, he set the pen down and placed the paper in the envelope. His eyes that constantly roamed the space caught sight of a door that he had not inspected yet. Striding over, he grabbed his suit jacket from the back of the couch, looping it through the handles of the duffle bag. Hannibal pushed the door open, revealing a small bathroom.

It was simple. A toilet, a small sink with one faucet, and a box of a shower. The room smelled like bleach. Taking one step forward, Hannibal pushed the curtain open with the pen. Hanging inside was his plastic suit, spotless. Quickly grabbing the suit from its hanger, Hannibal left the bathroom and headed for the front door of the house.

"Now, about the car problem," Hannibal looked outside the small window in the door. Hannibal Lecter shoved on the boots Will Graham offered him previously and set out for the road.

His cheek rested against his shoulder as he slumped over. White sheets carefully wrapped around his skull. The length of his arm extended to the ground, leaning out of the tub, unblemished skin taught over defined muscle. Fingers gripped a feather, poised as if he was caught in the middle of writing. The feather as his quill and the mud as his inkpot. His left arm lay on the edge of the tub he sat in, balancing as carefully as a performer on a tightrope and cushioned by the white sheets pooling over the tub. These fingers clutched a bloodstained note. Soft lids were left closed, his mouth partially askew and open. He was almost a man who had simply fallen asleep in the bath. Deep maroon dripped meticulously down the collarbone of waxy porcelain, reaching towards his dusty pink nipple. Emerald green blanketed the tub, daring any voyeur a peak underneath.

A gruesome promise.

Will choked on his breath as his chest began to heave. His glassy eyes examined the photo pinned to the board in front of him. A shudder erupted in the base of his spine, shooting through his veins and nerves and flowing to his shaking fingertips. He wrapped his arms across his chest and tapped his fingers on his arms, masking the excitement as nerves.

“N’ayant pu me, corrompre ils m’ont assassiné,” Captain Poirier read, sliding the evidence bag across the table. It contained the note.

Not having been able to corrupt me, they murdered me.

“This victim has no record. He was mutilated, from the looks of it, probably pre-mortem, but his legs are missing. He was found in a bathtub, soaking in his own blood. *In the bayou* . See why I called you? I think this might be a copy–”

“You’re wrong,” Will lied, “It’s a Rougarou victim,”

With his duffel bag in hand, Hannibal set off for the road. He did not lock Will's doors before he left. He guided himself towards down the narrow driveway, sunlight streaming through the gaps in the treeline. The sun beat down on him heavily, making the temperature feel as if it was climbing every minute. Hannibal pressed on, strolling down the road. A half hour of walking passed before the hum of a car sounded from behind him. His arm ached from carrying the bag. The bag had started to drip, contents thawing. He raised his hand towards the road and stuck out his thumb, head facing the sound of the car.

A silver sedan drifted from one side of the road to the other, the gravel crackling underneath the tires that beat them up and scattered them. Schooling the sneer that began to peek through, Hannibal licked the inside of his mouth, zipping his person suit back up, pulling it over his head to cover his horns. Will's words were a whisper in his ear, the soft breeze like Will's breath as the words brushed over his skin.

You've boarded up the windows and hollowed out your eyes .

As the car slowed, it neared, stopping a bit beyond where Hannibal stood. Stepping to the passenger side of the car, the window lowered, revealing a middle-aged man, dressed in a gray suit, his navy-blue tie loosened around his neck. His matching gray slacks were belted, the buckle sitting low on his waist. One hand sat on the wheel, the other on the center console, holding an open beer. It was half-empty.

Before the man could speak, Hannibal plastered a charming smile on his lips, hiding the monster’s teeth.

"Good afternoon, my car broke down a few miles back. Would you be so kind? I'm new to the area, and this is supposed to be my first day consulting. I'd rather not make a bad first impression," The car doors clicked.

"Sure, it's your lucky day, sir." The man pointed to the cup holders between the driver and passenger seats. "Take the unopened one, my treat," Hannibal smiled graciously, picking up the

beer bottle. "So, where are you on your way to?"

“Might I ask you to take me to Baton Rouge?”

“You’re pretty off the beaten path! That’s about 45 minutes drivin’ down route 10 over here.” The man took a swig of beer. The car veered to the left, crossing into the opposite lane.

"I am a medical examiner, from Johns Hopkins University. I've been asked for to assist on the Rougarou murders." The man straightened in his seat, setting the beer in the empty cup holder.

"So, you work for the police?" The car accelerated.

"Yes, that's right," They passed a road sign.

Interstate 10

Baton Rouge

“Listen, I’ve only had this one beer. I’m honestly sober, I just popped this one open just a few sips,” Hannibal adjusted in his seat, turning to glance at the back seat. It was littered with empty beer bottles and IPA cans. Sweat beaded on the man's forehead. Hannibal raised his nose to the air.

"Pity," He lifted the unopened glass bottle, reading the label. "A beer marinated roast would have been quite lovely," The man glanced at him with confused eyes before turning back to watch the road, over-corrected as the car drifted. Back and forth. Back and forth. "Nerves make the meat taste too sour for my liking," Hannibal smashed the beer bottle against the dashboard and lunged, stabbing the bottle into the man's neck with surgical precision. The windshield was splattered with cheap beer and thick blood.

The car swerved on the road as the man bled out. Hannibal reached over with his other hand, grabbing the wheel to steer. The man's hand shook as he tried to grab at his own throat. The man gripped the neck of the bottle, slick with blood. His fingers slipped as he tried to pull it out of his neck, but he couldn't muster the strength to remove it. As the man grew weaker from the blood gushing out of his jugular, his foot also let up on the accelerator. Hannibal took over the steering wheel completely, as the man's hand fell off of it.

As the car finally slowed to a stop, Hannibal opened his door and got out. Before crossing to the driver's side of the car, he looked both ways. With no one coming, Hannibal opened the driver's side door and yanked the man out of the car, popping the trunk. Dragging the man by the armpits, Hannibal hauled him into the trunk. He traded the trunk the man's body for a roll of paper towels.

Getting back into the car, this time in the driver's seat, Hannibal adjusted the mirrors, catching his reflection's eyes. Tearing off a piece of paper towel, he folded it over once and dabbed the bits of blood off of his cheekbone. He licked the bit of blood from his chin, dabbing it like the paper towel was a restaurant napkin. Surveying the car, Hannibal quickly mopped up the drops of blood that had hit the dashboard. The majority of the man's blood had coated the outside of his body. There were only a couple drops of blood that had touched the car.

Pocketing the sullied paper towel, Hannibal restarted the car, the engine thrumming to life beneath his hands. He checked his mirrors, and got back on the road, following the signs for Baton Rouge.

“Do you hear yourself? This victim doesn’t even have loitering on their record!” Cassandra threw her arms up, turning to the evidence board behind them. “It’s so clean I could use it as a plate!” She handed the case file to Will, who accepted it gingerly. He leafed through the papers.

“Then whatever this one did must have been pretty up there! You know just as well as I do that violent psychopaths have quite the tendency to look like boy scouts,” Cassandra threw her face in her hands, shaking her head.

“You said it yourself,” Will continued, his words sharp, “the Rougarou has gravely escalated. I would stop chasing sick daydreams of another murderer because your wolfman chase just got a whole lot bigger,” He tossed the file onto the table. It landed with a loud slap. Will crossed his arms again, holding his elbows.

"Will, what are you saying? Come on, take a second to think about this! You've always said you interpret the evidence. Well, interpret it! Use your imagination. I know it's in there. I can't be the only one who sees this break in pattern,"

Will was silent. Captain Poirier was right. Hannibal's work was a work of art. The Rougarou's kills were business. This man was elevated in death, elevated in a way that the Rougarou wouldn't dare to do. Will saw it as business. Justice. Hannibal took the ugly, the unworthy, the rude, and ripped them open, ripped them into pieces and rearranged their pathetic bodies and lives, using their scraps as material to create into genuine art that was truly worthy of awe.

"Pick a lane, Captain. It should be easy for you since there is only one here," Will snapped, rubbing his forehead. He kept his eyes to the ground. His shoulder twinged in pain, the muscles feeling as if they were trying to pull apart from each other in protest.

"Now if you'll excuse me, according to my doctor, my leave is still in full effect. I shouldn't even be here, Captain," Will turned on his heel, heading towards the conference room door.

"If you call me again, don't be surprised if I refuse to come in,"

"Will,” Captain Poirier’s voice was gentle, “We need you. I know you are healing, but what does your shoulder have to do with just looking at a case file? I'll have someone drop it off at your house. We need you, Will. I have an entire police force at my command, but I don't have another you. Please, just think it over, Will. I won’t force you,” She slipped her hands into her pockets and leaned against the table. “I've known you since you were a boy. Trust me when I say we should look into the possibility of another killer.” Captain Poirier looked at Will, her brow furrowed in concern. “Just promise me you'll look over the case file again, okay?"

Around one o'clock in the afternoon, Hannibal Lecter walked into the Baton Rouge Police Department. Approaching the front desk, familiar brown curls caught his eye. Hannibal watched Will through glass walls. He stood across from a Korean woman who stood a bit shorter than him. His mouth moved quickly as he spoke, his arms wrapped across his chest, hands resting in the folds

of his elbows. He stood slightly hunched, his face turned towards the floor, his eyes studying the floor as if it was a puzzle. The woman across from him exclaimed in what appeared to be upset, her arms thrown around as she responded. She gestured towards the corkboard that sat behind them. She grabbed a manilla folder off of the table, holding it out to Will. He winced as he accepted the folder, opening it. The woman put her head in her hands, her lips barely moving. Hannibal watched Will skim the contents of the folder before closing it and tossing it on the table. He shook his head at the woman. They started again, a back and forth of conversation that Hannibal could not hear from behind the glass wall.

"How may I help you, sir?" The desk sergeant returned, her eyes glued to the clipboard in her hands. She flipped through paperwork. Hannibal stared at her for a moment, restraining a glare. He cleared his throat instead. The desk sergeant looked up at him.

"If you would be so kind as to deliver this to William. I was his surgeon who operated on his shoulder. I wanted to see how he was doing. I figured he would be resting at home and I don't know his address, but I recalled that he worked with the Baton Rouge police,"

"Oh, Will Graham?" Hannibal smiled warmly.

"That'd be correct. I see he is actually here, but quite busy at the moment," He gestured to the conference room where Will continued to argue with the older woman. The desk sergeant followed his gesture, glancing over her shoulder.

"Oh, Captain Poirier decided to call him in. Despite the doctor's orders, it seems," She chuckled, turning back around. "Anyway, I'll be sure to get that to him for you." Hannibal was gone. The desk sergeant looked around, "Doctor?"

"Promise me you'll get some rest, Cas. You look like hell. Don't let this guy take your health too," Turning on his heel, Will left for the door, pushing it open and stalking through the precinct with a flourish. In an instant, he was gone, leaving Captain Poirier to stare at the evidence board, her brows furrowing together in confusion, frustration, and stress. As Will stalked towards the exit of the precinct, someone called after him.

"Will!" He stopped in his tracks. The desk sergeant, Florence Breau, sat at her position. "Before you leave, I've got something for you,"

"Thanks Florence, but you can just mail that to me. I should get back to my dogs and this arm is still killing me," Will turned to leave again.

"Even with that hot doctor, it's still bothering you? It's from him, he came on by to ask about you," Will approached her desk, his hand on the counter.

"My... surgeon came in?" Will squinted slightly, looking past Florence's desk. He could see Captain Poirier through the glass from here. Will blanched.

"Yeah, just now. He left this for you," Florence slid the envelope across the desk with two fingers. "He was pretty insistent you get this. Pretty sweet if you ask me. Hey, do you know where he is

from? I've never heard an accent like that before," Will ripped open the envelope and pulled out a small square piece of paper with black ink staining the paper in elegant calligraphy. An invitation.

Dr. Hannibal Lecter requests the pleasure of your company for dinner at 7:00 this evening at the Chateau Phoebe of New Orleans, Louisiana.

Will shoved the invitation back into its envelope. His heart thumped loudly in his ears.

"When did he come in?" Will turned to the desk sergeant, his hand went to his hip, his fingers brushing against the gun in the holster.

"Just now. He left only a couple moments ago," Before the desk sergeant had finished her sentence, Will bolted towards the exit. Shoving the door open, Will was met with a sea of his co-workers' cars. All were empty, parked, and shut off. The sun reflected off of the cars and beat down on Will's back. Will panted, humidity coating the inside of his dry throat. He tried to inhale through his nose, trying to swallow whatever saliva was left in his mouth. Will cursed through grit teeth and headed to his truck. As the door shut after him, he let the mask fall from his face, a chuckle slipping through his lips. He emptied the envelope again, reading the invitation again. His laughter filled the empty silence of the truck.

Leaning over to the passenger seat, Will popped open the glove compartment and pulled out a map of Louisiana. Finding his location, he traced his fingers along the highway until they found New Orleans. Flipping through the pages of the map, Will stopped at the map of New Orleans, his fingers tracing along Bourbon Street. He studied the map until he found the name written on the invitation.

"Chateau Phoebe," Will closed the map and set it on the passenger seat.

Although satisfied with his performance, his mind wandered to Hannibal. Why hadn't he pinned it all on him? He easily could have. *But you didn't* . The voice in his head sounded suspiciously like the man himself, his accent thick in his mind.

"This will be a problem," Will muttered through clenched teeth, plunging the key into the ignition forcefully, and turning it, letting the engine roar to life under his hands. Some things never change. The familiarity of the purring engine soothed him. New Orleans was a long drive.

As he approached his destination, Will's eyes struggled to stay open, attempting to fall shut against his will. Although the sun was heading west, it was not dark outside nor had the heat let up. Will pulled into the parking lot of the motel. The motel sign declared *No Vacancy* despite there only being two cars parked. He did not pull into the parking lot. Instead, he drove a couple hundred feet down the road where he parked on the shoulder. Will got out of the car and shut the door as quietly as possible. He pulled his gun out of his holster, treading quietly down the road.

As the motel came into view, he crouched, sneaking to the door closest to him. Putting a hand over the doorknob, he turned it. It was open. His breath hitched in his throat. Taking a breath, Will pushed the door open with the barrel of his gun, pointing it into the room. Nothing was out of place. The bed was neatly made. The television was shut off. The lights were off. Will stalked

closer, surveying the room. Everything was set up and ready for the next guest. The kitchenette, however, was missing a knife block. The next room was missing a coffee pot. And the next was missing the kitchen table and chairs. And the next, a blender.

Finally reaching one of the last rooms, Will pushed open the door. The room was bigger than the others, but that's not what drew his attention. Will was met with a man sat at a set dinner table, his wrists and ankles bound to the armrests and legs of his chair, dressed in a bloody suit that did not fit him. Tears slid down his face, his mouth gagged with a dishtowel. Will watched as his body shook with silent cries. He swung around, hearing water running from a faucet in the other room.

Through the open doorway, Will could see the silhouette of a tall man toweling his hands dry projected on the kitchen wall. Will pressed a finger to his lips, and then ignored the man in the chair. He padded towards the open doorway. The man screamed into the gag as Will put his gun back into his holster. He entered the kitchen.

"Hello, Doctor Lecter,"

"Will, you are quite early. I find this to be incredibly rude,"

Hannibal stood at the kitchen island. A skinned and butchered thigh sat in front of him on a cutting board. Will watched as he seasoned the meat, stuffing cloves of garlic into it and surrounding it with peppers and onions.

"But, I will make an exception since there is still much to prepare for our dinner tonight." The oven whistled a lovely tune as it finished pre-heating, music dancing around the kitchen. "Would you care to sous-chef?"

Chapter End Notes

How are we feeling? Hannibal attacking people, Will gaslighting people, what else is new?

Let me know! I love hearing your opinions and chatting with you!

See you next Tuesday!

I'm A Young 39

Chapter Notes

Hello hello! Welcome to another chapter! This one was extremely fun to write! In the end notes I've added a link to the spotify playlist. The info about it is down there so check it out!

TW: Forced cannibalism and overall Hannibal brand violence.

Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I've gotta say, I'm not much of a cook," Will prowled around the island, staying on the opposite side of the doctor, "And you," Will clicked his tongue, his eyes flicking down to the human remains in his hands, "Well, you seem to be well-trained in this specific type of cuisine,"

"More the reason you should be the sous-chef. I believe in learning on the job and you have a magnificent teacher to guide you," The veins in the back his hands flexed as he massaged seasoning into the meat. Blood seeped into the bottom of the Pyrex tray, Hannibal's long fingers pink with blood.

"Lucky me," Hannibal gestured to the knife block on the kitchen counter.

"Wouldn't that be rude, Doctor Lecter? Having your guest help prepare the meal?" Will's footsteps were not heavy despite his heavy boots. He stood in front of the doorway now, the whimpers of the man in the other room echoing into the kitchen. Will slowly lifted his head and blinked, finally bringing himself to look at the monster wearing a man's skin.

"We are in a unique position, Will," Hannibal's eyes burned brightly as they bored into Will's gaze, "Considering you have experience preparing this cut of meat." Hannibal tossed a potato at Will, who caught it quickly with his good arm. "A conscientious choice for canines," Will's adam's apple bobbed, unable to escape a gaze so strong it could disrupt the Earth's magnetism. Will snatched a blade from the knife block and began to peel the potato.

“For a motel room kitchen, you’ve really outdone yourself,” Having had enough, Will averted his gaze once more, staring at the eyes of the vegetable in his hand rather than Hannibal's.

“This is the deluxe suite of Chateau Phoebe,” Hannibal's tone was almost offended. Will's lips pulled back in a toothy grin as he sliced the skin off the potato.

“The deluxe suite of a motel. But hey, whatever helps you sleep at night, Doc,” They worked in silence, but found themselves tacitly falling into a system. They passed each other in the kitchen as they worked, entirely aware of each other's presence as they prepared the food. Instead of idle chatter, the kitchen was filled with the clutter of pots and pans, the chopping of knives, and the hum of the overhead fan. Tying the twine around the roast and into a bow, Hannibal cut the excess with a knife in two quick and precise slashes. He lifted the pan and turned to the stove. Will already

stood next to it, opening the oven. The dry heat of the stove engulfed the two of them. Hannibal smiled courteously, nodding his head in thanks.

Will waved the knife around as Hannibal bent over to set the roast on the oven rack. Will stared at Hannibal's back, strings of the plain white apron tied into a neat bow around the small of his back, pressing into the thin fabric of his button down. He had changed into simple black slacks that were tailored to fit his tall figure. He had changed his shoes. Gone were the muddy boots Will had thrown to him, replaced with black leather dress shoes that reflected the sickening yellow light of the motel suite's kitchen. Will's legs stood immobile, but shaking with anticipation. His fingers flexed around the knife handle, searching for a hint of familiarity to ground him.

A defeated moan drifted into the kitchen. Twitching, Will snapped his attention away from Hannibal, who had begun to stand upright and close the oven. Will gestured with the knife to the makeshift dining room.

"Who's the guy?" Will stared at the back of the man's head of mousy brown hair, the roots drenched in sweat. His head slumped to the side, his eyes closed. The occasional moan escaped from his lips, his voice obstructed by the gag.

"Sanguinaccio Dolce," Will glanced back to Hannibal. He tended to a pot of vegetables blanching on the stove, the aroma wafted through the air and intertwined with the smell of the meat as it roasted. The two began to dance, complimenting one another as they pulled the best hints of scent out of each other. Will inhaled it greedily.

"Come again?" Will leaned against the wall and crossed his legs.

"A dessert of Italian origin. A pudding that employs the sweet taste of chocolate balanced by the metallic tang of pig's blood. I wanted to ensure that our dessert was fresh. You are the guest of honor tonight,"

"Charming," Will's words dripped like honey from his lips which curled in a shark-like grin. "What else needs sous-cheffin'?"

"You, Will, have given me a wonderful option to consider," Hannibal stood to the side of Will, who was sitting across from Hannibal's empty seat at the far end of the table. He poured Will a glass of red wine.

"What's that? Opening a restaurant where you provide the delicacy meats? This excites you, doesn't it? The fox who waits patiently as he watches the chicken taste the blood of the others? The chicken gets hooked, obsessed really. It kills its whole flock, gorging on the flesh of its brothers while drowning in the guilt. Not because it ate them, no. It's the guilt that sets in when the chicken realizes it just can't stop because the others just tasted so good. Then, the fox slaughters the chicken for an added thrill. Is that what you intend to do with me? To me?" Will stared at the dish in front of him, pushing the meat with his fork. It was so tender, the prongs pierced it without much effort. Hannibal smoothly responded without a beat.

"You forget, Will. We have another guest. As much as it is in your nature to do so, don't give into such rudeness," Will's knuckles whitened, fingers tight around the knife. "I propose we play a small game," Hannibal had moved around the table, now pouring their guest a glass of wine. The man's hands were still tied to the armrests of the chair. "I shall ask you a question and you shall answer. You shall ask a question of me, and I shall answer with what you wish to know,"

"And if I refuse to play this game of yours?"

"I will rip out your intestines, stuff them with the meat I tear off your bones, and then feed you to your dogs." Hannibal met his gaze immediately, his hand on his own chair as he moved to sit. "And, not to mention I will be incredibly disappointed."

Will chuckled into his wine glass, the red liquid kissing his pink lips, "Well, bless your heart." Hannibal brought his glass to his nose, his lips smiling behind the wine he smelled.

"I take this as an affirmative?" Will snorted into his own drink. His eyes twinkled with amusement, smiling around the rim of the glass.

"Game on, Doctor Lecter," Will threw the last of his wine back, swallowing it all down despite the dry burn of the wine as it slid down his throat, "Pass me another," He reached his hand out for the wine bottle. Hannibal took in the fisherman in front of him with a look of curiosity, like a cat eager to chase a laser toy, before handing him the bottle. The man that sat in between them wailed into the gag.

"Why am I here, Hannibal? You should've just stayed at the house. Especially with the free pass I gave you,"

“What better way to thank someone than cooking him dinner? How does the Baton Rouge Rougarou choose his victims?”

"The working profile says he is a righteous killer,” Will did not touch the food, instead asking his next question, “What would you have done to me last night?" Will stared at his plate. "Would you have killed me?"

"Do you feel alone, Will?"

"I asked you a question first. I'll repeat it since you are apparently hard of hearing. Why am I here?" Will punctuated each word, his jaw clenched as he seethed through his teeth.

“Is it lonely, having no one truly understand and accept your mind? Your impulses? Your true nature?” Hannibal pushed further, “Is that why you constantly hide yourself? Directly under the nose of the beast that hunts for you?”

"Shut up before I plunge this knife right into your guts. I'll remember to twist it real good since you’re not playing by your own rules." Will clenched the fork, pressing his thumb into the metal of the handle. “Since you won’t answer why I’m here, why are *you* here? Why choose to slum it in the Louisiana bayou?”

“I’ve grown bored of my career as a surgeon. I’ve decided to take a sabbatical to travel while I decide what I’d like to pursue instead. Like I said before, you gave me a wonderful idea to consider, so I thank you, Will,” Hannibal lifted his wine glass to toast, then took a sip, his eyes

flitting to Will’s plate. "Do you not eat pork, Will?" Will's plate was clean of vegetables. All that remained was the meat.

"I'll stick with fish," He prodded the meat with his knife.

"And yet you unabashedly feed the flesh of pigs to your dogs," Will brought the wine to his lips, downing the rest of his second glass.

"My dogs are not pigs. What am I to you? Am I a pig in your eyes, Doctor Lecter?"

"You are certainly not like our guest who sits beside you," The two turned to look at him, their heads turning in sync with each other. The man shrunk down as much as he could in the chair.

"The Rougarou doesn't kill those deemed innocent by law." Hannibal changed the subject as he sawed off a bite sized piece of meat from his dish with his utensils.

"The police found another victim with a clean rap sheet."

"Both you and I know that was not the Rougarou's chosen prey," Hannibal took a bite, his eyes closing in bliss as the flavors entertained his tongue. The man’s eyes widened, screaming as he realized who sat beside him at the table.

"Well, now we have to kill him, Doctor,"

"Sanguinaccio Dolce, Will. I need to double the recipe." Hannibal's eyes twinkled with anticipation.

"He was never getting out of here alive, was he?" Will set his utensils down.

"Did you truly believe it when you told yourself otherwise?"

The worker screamed from his gagged mouth, tears falling down his cheeks. The chair scooted out from under the table as Will stood, his palms flat on the surface. Grabbing the serving knife from the plated human roast, Will padded away from the table and into the blindspot of their guest. The man thrashed in his chair, the gag loosening and revealing red skin underneath, raw from sweat and saliva softening his skin to the harsh cloth. His cries became intelligible as the gag fell. Will huffed an exasperated sigh and tucked the serving knife in between his waistband and the thick belt that held up his pants.

"Please! Please, I'll give you anything. Stop!" He blubbered, saliva and snot painting his mouth and chin. Hannibal brought his wine glass to his nose, inhaling its aroma, his eyes sharp as they watched from over the rim. Will's voice poured over the man like molasses, his hands rubbing the man's tensing shoulders.

"Hush now," His hands roamed upwards, fingers wrapping around the man's neck for a quick moment before running over the soft part of his skull, massaging his scalp. As Will's hands pressed into the man's skull, his eyes drifted upwards, catching Hannibal's from across the table. Setting his wine glass down, Hannibal dabbed the corners of his mouth delicately with his napkin and placed it neatly beside his plate. He stood and walked towards Will and the tied up man, who began to scream. Will's hands wrapped around the man's trachea. He leaned down to whisper in his ear.

"I said--" Will squeezed his throat. " -*hush* ," The man gurgled as he choked. "You gonna be good if I let go?" The man nodded his head, his face turning blue. Hannibal watched from right in front of

the man, standing tall with his perfect posture and delicate smile. The man's bulging eyes were stuck on Hannibal when Will released his throat, triggering a coughing fit. Hannibal flinched as the man's coughs came his way and stepped to the side.

"Our guest seems to have a demeanor worse than your own, Will. What a difficult task to accomplish." Will scoffed, his fingers gripping the man's soft flesh. He whimpered, now trying to cough into a closed mouth.

"Just get on with it so I can go home. I have living beings I have to care for, unlike some people," Will spat back, prying the man's jaw open. "Now, hold still darlin'," Will drawled, his voice saccharine as he held the man's mouth open. Hannibal grabbed the man's plate that was full of his untouched portion. Stabbing a bite-sized piece of meat, peppers, potatoes, and various greens, Hannibal placed the fork in the man's mouth. The juice from the meat dripped onto Will's fingers. He did not flinch. The man sniveled, tears streaming down his eyes agape in horror.

"Be a good dinner guest and play along," Will hissed and let go of the man's jaws, wiping the saliva off of his hands on the man's shirt. Quivering under the presence of the other two, the man acquiesced. He chewed slowly, tears gushing down his face as his eyes started to become vacant. Will slapped the man across the face. Hannibal placed the fork back on the table neatly, as if it hadn't been used.

"Don't leave us, not yet," Will put his hands on the man's shoulders, pressing down. "The good Doctor and I won't stop until we see you swallow it. Don't be pathetic,"

"Accosting the other dinner guest is not polite, Will," The man chewed once, twice, and then he stopped. He continued to sniffle, but no tears fell.

"Shut up, you got us here, now I'm just doing what you wanted, Doc," Hannibal brought his lips together, pressing them in a firm line. He crouched down to be face to face with the shaking man in the chair.

"I apologize for the behavior of the other dinner guests. Despite his egregious behavior, I must agree. Now, open up. Did you at least finish one bite of dinner?" The man pressed into the back of the chair, away from Hannibal but backing further into Will's grip. He was quaking too much to discern a nod or a shake of the head. Will shook him by the shoulders.

"Hello? the Doctor said to say 'Ahhh,' he needs to check your throat," The man spat out the half-chewed meat and vegetables and thick saliva. Hannibal raised his eyebrows and hummed. Hannibal stood, his knees popping as he loomed over the man. He stared down at him from over his nose.

"I do not believe my cooking is so atrocious that it would warrant this sort of response,"

Grabbing the edges of the gag that hung loose around the man's neck, Will yanked and the man's head fell backwards. As the man screamed into the gag and thrashed more, Will rolled his eyes and kicked the back of the chair. Snatching the knife from his waist, Will took a wild stab at the man's throat, blood spurting onto his face.

“The Rougarou hates playing around with victims, Doctor Lecter. But, you wouldn't know that. You haven't read my profile on him," Will walked away from the mess of a man in the chair. His mouth bubbled with his own blood and saliva, spurting from his neck and gushing out of his mouth. Will tore the knife out of the man's neck while twisting it to further damage the wound. He dropped the knife on the carpeted floor. "Get something to collect this before you lose your precious

ingredients. I'm done with this game," Will stalked off to the bathroom and slammed the door shut. The sound of running water penetrated through thin walls, but it was indiscernible from the fountain of blood the dying motel worker had become.

Hannibal stared at the shut bathroom door, as if he could see past the cheap wood. With his hands at the sides of his apron, his eyes traveled down to the dying man in the chair. His skin was already a shade paler, his body convulsing as he exsanguinated.

"Against my better judgment, I find you interesting, William," Hannibal spoke to the wall but quickly hurried to the kitchen to fetch a measuring cup. As fast as he was, when Hannibal returned to the blood-spattered dining room, Will had exited the bathroom and was seated at his place at the table. Hannibal caught a glimpse of Will's fork entering his mouth, the meat on his plate half-eaten. Will turned in his seat when Hannibal's footsteps alerted him of his return.

"What are you standing there for? Get on with that dessert, Doc," Will stood from the table and grabbed Hannibal's half-full wine glass. Handing it to the Doctor, Will flashed a smile, "If it's as good as the main course, you'd better hurry on up,"

The sun had already begun to set once Captain Poirier left the police station. Once she crossed the threshold of the parking lot, Cassandra did not turn to go home. Instead, she followed the signs for the interstate and left Baton Rouge, headed for the town of Henderson. She did not need GPS. The interstate highway was empty, her headlights the only lights to brighten her way as she flew down the highway. She drove in silence until the police radio crackled to life, filling the loud silence of the car.

"10-45d," Condition of patient - dead. " 10-55d," Send coroner. "Body of one white male, approximately late 40s, found on the side of Route 10 westbound towards Baton Rouge. Foul play is suspected," . Listening to the radio as she exited the highway, she drove on autopilot, taking various turns based on muscle memory and experience. Cassandra wiped the back of her hand across her forehead, wiping away the sweat falling down her skin and into her brows. Her blinker clicking to life one more time, Cassandra made a turn off of the gravel path and onto a driveway of beaten ground, surrounded by dense forest. She could hear the cicadas buzzing all around from inside her car. Tumbling down the driveway, Cassandra parked in front of the old cabin and threw her face into her hands. She rubbed her palms in circles around her eyes, soothing the impending headache. When she had recovered, Cassandra got out of the car and headed to the front door.

"Will?" She opened the old screen door to knock on the other, "I came because I wanted to apologize for today. I shouldn't have pushed you, it wasn't fair to you," There came no answer except for the silhouettes of a few dogs of varying sizes. Cassandra knocked again. "Will? I know you're upset with me, but can we talk?" She placed her hand on the doorknob. Cassandra's back straightened like a needle, her breath freezing in her lungs. The door was unlocked.

Drawing her gun from her holster, Cassandra pushed into the house and announced herself as law enforcement. The dogs huddled around her feet, tails wagging and noses snuffling at her feet. Ignoring them, Cassandra remained quiet and toed around the house, her gun in front of her. The entire house, however, was empty of people.

"Where did your Daddy go, hmm?" Cassandra cooed, now kneeling to pet one of the smaller dogs, Buster. Making her way to the kitchen, she found various breakfast items sitting on the counter. A bowl filled with a milky mush sat barely touched on the small dining room table. Strawberry tops sat on a cutting board. The milk carton sat, now warm and spoiled, on the counter beside the unpalatable cuts of the fruit. Raising a brow, Cassandra chewed on the inside of her cheek as she pushed the patio door open, pointing straight ahead at the intruder she expected. She did not find an intruder, but instead found herself making out the shape of a sleek, black car. Will did not ever buy or own such a fancy car.

Running back into the house, Cassandra pulled out her phone to make a call. Looking at the time, however, she did not make it. *9 o'clock in the evening.* She shut her phone and pocketed it along with her gun which was put back in her holster.

"Will? William?" She called once again, a frantic concern lacing the call of her voice. "If you don't answer, I'll have no choice but to bring in a search party." One of the dogs whined loudly and plopped down next to the food bowls. "Okay, calm down Cassandra, it'll be fine. Just feed the dogs for him. He'll be back soon," She muttered while puttering around the kitchen, looking for the dog food in the cabinets. The dogs followed her around, their tails occasionally smacking into her legs or the cabinets and appliances. Pouring the dog food into each bowl as evenly as possible, Cassandra found herself huffing in exhaustion as she finished feeding them.

One of the dogs simply sniffed at the dry dog food, his eyes drooping low afterwards. He did not eat and instead walked away and towards the door. He nosed the closed door that led to the backyard, jumping on his short legs to hit the door with his paws, trying but not tall enough to reach the doorknob. Taking it as the dog's need to use the facilities, Cassandra opened the door and let the dogs onto the porch.

"If you guys aren't wiggin' out, then I shouldn't worry yet," She watched through the screen door as the dogs puttered around the grass and sniffed the ground halfheartedly. Crossing her arms across her chest, Cassandra waited, her eyes crinkling in the corners as she smiled when each dog dutifully returned to the porch and waited to be let back inside. Once her headcount revealed all the dogs, she opened the door and let them back in, shutting and locking the door behind them. One of the dogs, Winston, bounded up to her with a rope toy in his mouth, his pupils dilated and his ears perked up. His tail swung back and forth quickly, hitting the fridge and knocking down a magnet.

"You wanna play?" The tired lines on her face softened as she beamed, Winston in response jumping and trying to hold himself up on his back legs, his front paws tucked against his chest. "I guess we can wait a bit. Maybe he had a follow-up appointment," Winston bounded after Cassandra as she went over to the living room to sit down on the couch. Grabbing one end of the chew toy, Cassandra tugged and Winston pulled right back.

"Come on, is that all you've got?" Cassandra goaded playfully as she pulled harder. Winston pulled back, growling as he fought for the rope toy. Then, he stopped, Cassandra yelping as she fell backwards, crashing into the couch cushions, the slobbered rope toy in her hands. Winston stood at attention, his head perked towards the front door. The other dogs clambered from their beds, their claws clattering on the floor as they ran to the front door. Winston did not move, but his tail began to wag as he stood next to Cassandra on the couch.

A few moments after the dogs, Cassandra heard what they had. The motor of a car hummed, growing louder as it approached the house. Cassandra stood from the couch and pulled her gun

from her holster, headlights flashing through the front windows and into the house. She crept into the kitchen and towards the front door, her gun at the ready to aim at whoever walked in.

"Hell," Will cursed, his foot on the brakes as he pulled up to the house, the car's headlights revealing another car parked in the front of his house. He turned to the passenger seat, "You keep startin' shit and I've gotta deal with it," Hannibal sat next to Will, a covered glass platter in his lap. His eyes rounded, staring at Will's scowling face, his eyes gleaming with satisfaction. If he was a cat like the predator he was, Hannibal would have been purring. Will put the car in park and turned off the engine.

"She will believe your dinner party excuse much better with evidence," Hannibal handed the dessert platter to Will, who accepted it reluctantly.

"You just get off on this," With one hand holding the blood pudding, Will pushed Hannibal's shoulder as he too got out of the car. He stumbled for a second before regaining his footing gracefully. Will had already rounded the car and stood in front of Hannibal, a hand stopping him from going any further.

"You go around back to the barn. I'll get rid of her. She doesn't need to see you here,"

"Careful, Will. You sound like you are beginning to care for me,"

"Is that what you think?" Will chuckled, his brows raised in disbelief, "I have other plans for you, Doctor Lecter. I just need to get rid of any witnesses,"

"Just the two of us, then. No matter how the cards fall, there will be a hunter and the hunted," Hannibal held Will's face in his palm, his thumb caressing the supple skin just in front of his ear but behind his sideburn. Will's glassy eyes widened, looking up at Hannibal with an air of innocent pleading.

"Just go, sha. This won't benefit either of us if she stays, now will it?" Hannibal slipped away into the dark of the night like a phantom. Shedding his skin, Will closed his eyes, letting the pendulum swing behind his eyelids. Opening them, he slipped into a different Will Graham. His posture shifted, closing himself off while simultaneously making himself appear smaller. Walking up the stairs, he opened the front door to his house and was met with the barrel of a gun in his face.

"Sweet baby Jesus, Will you scared the living daylights out of me! I was about to call in a search party," Cassandra switched the safety on her gun and put it back in her holster. She wore the same clothes she had worn earlier.

"Did you come here straight from work?" Will asked, his voice hushed. The dogs ran up to his feet, excitedly sniffing at his legs. They ran to their food bowls and waited patiently, tails sliding back and forth on the floor. Cassandra laughed as she watched them.

"I tried to feed them, but I guess they'll only eat when their Dad is home," Will let his lips curve in a quiet half-smile.

"They're particular about their food. They expect me to feed them pork," Will bit his tongue. Cassandra laughed it off.

"Spoiled rotten," She teased. Will did not laugh.

"Why are you here, Cas? Dropping off a case file?"

"I wanted to apologize for earlier, Will. I shouldn’t have asked you to look into it. I shouldn't have even called you in. That's all I came here for, but you scared me. What's with the fancy car out back?"

"Someone wanted it looked at, is all,"

"Someone? Were you out with them just now?" She probed, a genuine smile gracing her lips.

"As a matter of fact, yes." Will plopped the dessert in her hands. “I just dropped him off and would like to turn in for the night. Enjoy the leftovers,"

"Alright, well. Remember to lock your doors next time, or else I'll call a search party immediately if this happens again," Will’s eyebrow twitched.

"Sure, Cas. Goodbye, I'll check in with you later in the week," Shutting the door behind her, Will locked it and pulled the window curtains shut. As he heard her car veer away and the sound faded into the night, Will ripped open the back door and stalked outside. As he approached the barn, he made out Hannibal with his hands clasped behind his back, staring at the moon and the stars.

"Astrologers believe that those born under the waning gibbous strive to improve others and the world around them," Hannibal offered, eyes tracing the constellations above him.

"Astrologers confuse correlation with causation," Will seethed with his teeth clenched, "You're a petty old man!" Hannibal continued to catalog the constellations as he watched the sky, "You left the doors open, letting the police captain inside, who almost called a search party because she thought I was kidnapped. And your prints are all over that house too, you ass."

"I am a young 39, Will," He shoved Hannibal in the chest, yelling out in exertion. Hannibal stumbled backwards but caught himself. He rolled up his sleeves, his mouth twisting in a crooked smile as he finally acknowledged Will.

"See? You are a natural hunter, Will. You are more than a simple fisherman," The two locked eyes, standing across from each other. A warm breeze blew softly, clothes and hair ruffling as they stood at a standstill, watching each other.

"Everyone has a choice, but you took mine away! That man didn't deserve to die,"

"You were the one who stabbed him in the neck. Quite an impulsive decision that you chose to make,"

"I put him out of his misery! I'm not like you, I don't-" Will shook his head, his voice quivering as it started to break. He threw his head in his hands. His shoulders began to shake. Hannibal slowly approached Will, the grass crunching underneath his shoes. He reached to touch Will's neck. He whispered, his breath ghosting over Will's lips as he brought their foreheads together.

"You enjoyed killing him. You and I are just alike," Will grabbed Hannibal by the arm and slammed him into the ground, crying out in pain as his shoulder strained with the effort.

"You're right about some things, Doc. You're not the only one who knows how to manipulate," Will threw a punch to Hannibal's face, but missed as he threw his head to the side, cheek pressed into the grass. Hannibal gripped Will's waist with his legs and grabbed him by the shoulders, heaving both of them around to pin Will to the ground. Hannibal climbed on top, his chest heaving as he pinned Will's wrists to the damp earth. Will snarled, twisting under Hannibal, whose grip only tightened, his manicured nails digging into Will's wrists. Will grunted as he struggled, throwing his head upwards, headbutting him. Knocking him off, Will scrambled onto his knees over Hannibal, throwing another punch that landed this time, square in the jaw. He punched Hannibal in the face again, blood dripping from the cut on his forehead. Gripping Hannibal's lapels, he brought their faces close, knees digging into Hannibal's thighs.

"I'll enjoy this," Will panted into Hannibal's mouth, the two so close they shared the air they breathed. Hannibal inhaled Will's exhales. The blue of Will's eyes was obscured by the dark abyss of his pupils.

"Are you willing to be rid of the first person to finally see you? To make you feel less alone?" Hannibal's voice was hoarse, bringing a hand to clasp the back of Will's sweaty neck. In response, Will dragged a finger through the blood on Hannibal's forehead, shining with sweat and plastered with his dark hair. He brought his finger to his mouth, tasting Hannibal's blood while he watched.

"I should bleed you, you'd make that pudding taste way better than some pathetic motel worker," In the field under the light of the moon, Hannibal smiled a toothy, bloody smile.

“God, I want to fucking tear you apart.” Will pressed his lips to Hannibal's, licking the blood from his mouth as they devoured each other in the night.

Chapter End Notes

Oops poor motel worker didn't even get a name...

Let me know what you think! Love chatting with you guys and hearing what you have to say!

Thank you for comments, kudos, and bookmarks! Means a lot!

See you next week!

Trust Is Fickle

Chapter Notes

Welcome back! Are we excited? I know I am.

The fic rating is now upgrading from mature to explicit. I'd like to cover all of my bases ;)

As I was writing this chapter, my sister's response to a particular scene was as follows: "You know, sometimes it's alright to kink shame,"

Lastly, I am blown away by the support this fic has has gained! The comments, the bookmarks, the kudos! I am so grateful! Thank you so much, I'm glad you are enjoying it as much as I am.

Alright! On with the chapter! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Keys jiggled the lock, twisting the tumblers to align in the right places. The door to the dark house swung open. Cassandra Poirier walked into her kitchen and flipped the lights on, locked the door behind her, and slid off her shoes. She placed the dessert Will had gifted her on the dining room table. She ran her finger along the diamond shapes decorating the serving platter.

"Pretty," She took off her jacket and draped it over a chair. Picking up the platter, she headed straight for the kitchen, picking a spoon from the drying rack next to the sink. She headed straight for her home office.

Cassandra plopped down in her office chair, pulling her hair out of its simple three-strand braid. Pulling the platter towards her, she uncovered the dessert dish, revealing the pudding, so dark in color it appeared black. Cassandra yanked open the desk drawer and pulled out a thick manilla folder.

She flipped open the folder and took out the papers, laying them all out in front of her, just as she had in the conference room earlier. Multiple depictions of crime scenes sat in front of her. A blond whose arms had been shredded and stomach disemboweled. A brunette whose neck had been mauled, like it had been torn out with teeth. A redhead whose spine had been pulled through her chest, impaling her own heart. And another brunette, whose limbs had been dismembered with a blunt blade, his eyes and other chunks of flesh missing. Then there was the second one from the recent night. Splayed artfully in a makeshift bathtub, a bloody note in his hand. She read over the documentation of the note again.

N’ayant pu me corrompre, ils m’ont assassiné.

Cassandra took a spoonful of the pudding into her mouth, eyes flickering from the man in the bathtub to look at the pudding in awe.

"That's delicious," She hummed, smiling at the thoughtfulness Will had shown her, gifting her a wonderful dessert he probably didn't get to try. Taking the photo of the man in the tub in her hands, she munched on the pudding. She picked up the landline on her desk and began to dial a number, swallowing another spoonful. She put the phone to her ear. The phone rang three times before the other line picked up.

"This is Captain Cassandra Poirier," She listened to the other side, letting out a deep-bellied chuckle. "Yes, it has been a while, hasn't it? How's your wife?" She listened intently before giving her request. "Listen, I have a favor to ask of you. I'm looking over this case and want another opinion," Cassandra chattered away, giving a detailed description of each victim so far, periodically taking breaks to take a bite of the delectable pudding. She fell quiet, listening to the man on the other line.

"Right, I understand." As she listened, she twirled the spoon around in her dessert. "That's what I was thinking, too. My best detective doesn't agree. Yes, Will Graham, Eddie's kid." Another pause. "I don't know, I'll have to review the evidence again. Thanks for the consultation. See you around." Cassandra set the phone back on the hook. She looked over the paperwork spread out over her desk and threw her head in her hands. She massaged her temples, then reached into one of the side drawers. She pulled out a bronze coin, rotating it in her fingers. She stared at the token-like coin she played with, contemplating. With a heavy exhale, she threw the coin back into the desk drawer and focused her attention back to the case scattered across her desk. She reached for another bite of pudding.

"The Rougarou has escalated in violence," Captain Poirier stood in the center of the room, surrounded by the entire department. "I want each and every one of you to make catching this heinous case your first priority. He's terrorized the Baton Rouge area enough." She opened the file in her hands. "I want all of you to know our current profile of him like the back or your hand. A white, middle-aged male. Possibly with access to legal records and the courts. He seems to target his victims based on their criminal history. As of today, that's all we've been able to gather about him. But, that seems to have changed.

"Dubois and Martin," She ordered, "I want you to do a deep dive into the new victims' legal history. Find out if we missed anything that may have been expunged from the record, crimes they were acquitted for, whatever could explain the clean record. We're down a detective, and a damned good one at that. I need you all with this as your main focus. If you find anything, come directly to me." She scanned the crowd of officers and detectives. "We know next to nothing about this guy because he is incredibly intelligent. He has left no DNA evidence, nothing traceable. But he's human and bound to slip up. If you follow a lead, do not go alone,"

Captain Poirer took a breath. "The Rougarou is one vicious man working by himself. The closer we get, the more he'll feel boxed in. Be careful, use caution, and trust your gut." Captain Poirier dismissed the officers and detectives, but one approached her. "Yes, Breau?" She raised a brow, her arms crossing over chest.

"You have a visitor," The desk sergeant informed her without looking up from the paperwork she looked over in her hands. As she walked away, Captain Poirier caught a flash of bouncing red curls

and the flutter of a translucent, leopard print shawl coming from the edge of the waiting area.

"Captain Cassandra Poirier," She greeted, "Both you and I know for a fact that you didn't believe a word of that bullshit you spewed up there." The woman held out a hand, "Frederica Lounds, journalism student at the University of Maryland," Captain Poirier did not shake her hand. Instead she walked past her, headed towards her office.

"You're far from home. Have a safe drive back," Cassandra shut the door in her face and sought out her coffee pot. Frederica opened the door, letting herself in.

"I flew, actually." Frederica shut the door behind her, briefcase in hand. "It was quicker," Cassandra set her Styrofoam cup down in between the coffee pot and a picture frame holding the image of a child's smile, including two missing front teeth and bright blue eyes that looked too big for his face.

"Why are you here, Ms. Lounds? You want a statement about the Rougarou for a school paper? The murderer who's been terrorizing my city?"

"I have some information you might like. Don't you think that the newest victim is a weird choice?" Captain Poirier crossed her arms. Frederica sighed and shoved her hand in her bag, procuring a black folder. A white label with neat, black ink, read *Il Mostro di Firenze* .

"Read it for me. Just a little favor. Remember, the name is Frederica Lounds," A business card with her name was paper clipped to the top of the folder. Captain Poirier ran her hand over the front cover while Frederica opened the door.

"Where did you get this?" The door slammed shut. Frederica was gone. Captain Poirier looked through the office window, catching her mess of red curls swishing behind her as she exited the building. Captain Poirier looked at the front cover. Walking over to her desk, she opened the drawer and shoved the folder inside. Letting the drawer slam shut, she returned to her coffee pot. She looked at the picture of the little boy that sat next to the coffee machine on the table as she waited for the coffee to brew.

Will pushed himself off of Hannibal, climbing to his feet. He licked his swollen lips clean of blood. The whites of his eyes glowed in the moonlight, bloodshot veins appearing more black than red.

"The veins in your eyes are like withered vines in the moonlight. Black. Dying ivy creeping into the whites of your eyes," Hannibal's chest heaved. Blood smeared across his lips and chin. The cut on his forehead dripped red steadily down his temple.

"Is that supposed to be a compliment?" Will looked down at Hannibal. He didn't offer his hand. Hannibal climbed to his feet on his own. Will stepped backwards, distancing himself from Hannibal. He wiped the rest of the blood from his chin on the cuff of his sleeve.

"What's the matter?" Will's eyebrows shot up, his eyes staring down Hannibal. His mouth had dropped open. He scoffed.

"Unbelievable!" Hannibal tilted his head like a lost dog. "We can't do this," Will gestured to both of them.

"Can't or won't?" Hannibal licked his lips. Will shoved his hand in his pocket, grabbing his keys.

"I can't do this," Will reiterated. "If you'll excuse me, there's a body in the truck that needs attending to,"

Hannibal watched as Will disappeared, walking towards the front of the house. He did not wait long, the rumble becoming a familiar sound. The headlights did not shine. The truck rolled over the overgrown field, stopping inches in front of Hannibal. The truck door opened, the inside lights blinking to life. Will exited the truck, slamming the front door closed and immediately opening the back door. Hannibal's nose twitched at the smell that wafted out. A hum came from deep in his chest.

"You feeling peckish?" Will began to pull the motel worker's corpse by the legs.

"It's a shame we had to give away the choice dessert of the evening," Will yelped in pain, his hand flying to his shoulder. Hannibal walked over with a calm and steady stride, hovering behind Will.

"We continue to find ourselves in his position. I find myself asking a familiar question. Do you require my assistance?" Will's back deflated as he let out a sigh of compliance. Without a word, Will turned away from the back seat, letting Hannibal through.

"Have a look," He cradled his shoulder. "I won't knock you out this time," Will headed for the house, leaving Hannibal to deal with the body.

"Promise?" Will did not fire a quip back, instead batting the air with his hand in Hannibal's direction. Gazing upon the pallid corpse in the back seat, Hannibal looked down at his hands. He pulled his arms up, elbows tucked underneath his pectorals like a surgeon would after scrubbing in for a surgery. Poking his head in the car, he peeked around, careful not to prod anything. Not one hair touched the interior, let alone the corpse. The groomed hair on the back of his neck, however, stood up.

"Gloves should be in the door," Hannibal pulled out of the car, looking over the open car door. Will stood on the back porch, leaning over the railing. His pack of dogs surrounded him, some snuffling at his shoes and some sitting patiently. All wagged their tails wildly, whining in various frequencies. His eyes captured the moonlight, reflecting like prisms, as he watched Hannibal. Observing him while the warm winds of Henderson blew softly. Hannibal stuck his head back in the car and quickly procured the gloves that were exactly where Will said they would have been.

Sliding his fingers and palms into the gloves, Hannibal set out to work. Easily heaving the body over his shoulder, Hannibal turned towards the barn. A sharp series of whistles sounded from behind him, carried by the warm breeze. The grass rustled behind him, paws thudding against the ground. The smell of dog intertwined with the humidity as it reached Hannibal's nose. The dogs yipped and barked, quickly descending upon Hannibal, whose shoulders had tensed at the smell and sound. Turning around in anticipation, Hannibal caught sight of a bright grin on the patio, wet teeth shining brighter than the eyes like prisms. Another series of whistles.

The dogs immediately sat down, surrounding Hannibal. They panted happily.

"It's feeding time, darlin'," One of the dogs barked, while another, Winston, looked up at Hannibal expectantly. "You fed me. Now it's time to feed them." Hannibal took a tentative step the opposite way towards the house, towards Will. Growls rumbled from around him. With the threat around him and the burden of a dead man's weight bearing down on his back, Hannibal stayed put. Hannibal glanced down at the dogs, offering a smile.

"What fearsome creatures," Hannibal glanced up to the sound of the screen door slamming shut. No one stood on the patio. Winston shuffled to Hannibal's side, sniffing at his pant leg. His nose wiggled as it made its way upwards, his nose eventually hitting the limp hand of the corpse. He nosed at it and licked the dead man's fingers. The patio door swung open, Will walking out with the dogs' food bowls and a bottle of liquor. Another whistle. The dogs ran into the barn, disappearing into the dark. Hannibal looked to Will as he approached, his eyes shining bright blue in the soft moonlight.

"Come on now, no moseying'! We've still got a busy night ahead of us," Will ordered when Hannibal stared at him. Despite the dark light of the night, Will refused to meet his eyes, instead staring at the corpse over Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal licked the blood from his teeth and conceded, walking towards the barn.

Entering after Hannibal, Will shut the doors behind him, flicking on the light to illuminate the pitch black of the barn. The dogs began to bark from where they had lain on the floor. Will whistled sharply and they stopped.

"Patience," He chastised, setting down their bowls in front of them. He walked over to the wall of tools. He set the bottle on the workbench. "You have experience dismembering a body," Will ran his fingers over the different tools hanging on the wall. "So you will cut him up as you see fit. Feed him to my dogs. They haven't eaten dinner yet. I'd imagine they're starvin', so watch your fingers." Hannibal let the corpse fall to the ground, something popping as the body hit the ground.

Approaching the workbench, Hannibal stood inches away from Will's relaxed form. Hannibal leaned down, pressing his lips against the base of Will's neck. His back arched at the touch. Hannibal's gloved hand grazed the small of Will's back. His hand slid around his waist, pushing up the fabric. Leather caressed the tanned skin of Will's navel, sliding over the sweat that had gathered in the hair below his stomach but above his groin. A satisfied hum grew in his chest, Will's lips opening but refusing to moan at the touch. Hannibal's hand stilled, dangerously close to Will's crotch. His other hand shot upwards, long fingers wrapped around the front of Will's neck, tightening like a vice grip. Hannibal's knee nudged the pocket on the side of Will's pants, metal jingling.

"I could strangle you until you slipped into the quiet of your beautiful mind, take my keys, and be on my way. These gloves are a wonderful choice. Killing you this way would leave no fingerprints. Not to mention, they are a high quality of leather,"

"Captain Poirier saw your car. She was asking about it," Will's fingers gripped the workbench in front of him. He did not try to remove Hannibal's fingers. "You know what she said to me? That if I go missing again, she'll call on a whole search party," Despite the hand around his throat, Will croaked out a laugh, "And I told her I'd call her later," He neglected to say he told her he'd call later in the week. "What a predicament you've gotten yourself into. Whether you kidnap me or kill me, she'll be hot on your tail. You are trapped, which is something I'd bet you haven't felt in a long time. So you will do what I tell you to do. We are in my home, so we play by my rules. Got it?"

Hannibal removed his hand from Will's neck, his other lingering at Will's navel, warm to the touch. Will swatted his hand away.

"Don't be naughty, Doc, you'd be bordering on impolite," Will cracked his neck and swept the bottle off of the workbench. "Take your pick," Will stood at the end of the workbench, his bottom half obscured. He popped open the bottle of liquor, a bottle of Bourbon. While Hannibal reached for a simple pair of scissors and an electric saw, Will took a swig straight from the bottle. Careful to not step on any paws or tails, Hannibal knelt beside the body.

"That's all?" Will sat himself on the table of his fishing supplies, propping his feet up on the chair and resting his hand on his knee, the bottle hanging in front of his knee. Hannibal rolled his sleeves up to his elbows.

"Simplicity has the capacity to reward us well," Hannibal grinned.

"Coming from you and your fancy car? I find it hard to believe that you live by that, Doctor Lecter." Will took a sip. "Careful now, you might as well tell me a little goes a long way. That certainly has the *capacity* to make you sound awfully pedestrian,"

"My grasp on the English language allows me to present maxims in ways others never have before,"

"Oh, a god complex, too," Will griped. Hannibal grinned brightly, his teeth were sharp.

"I would love to converse with you about God, Will."

Without another word, Hannibal spread the scissors and pressed one blade to the man's sternum. He sliced the man open in two clinical cuts. There was minimal blood. "You did a wonderful job bleeding him," Hannibal complimented as he worked, peeling the layers of skin, fat, and muscle back forcefully with his hands. He eventually reached the man's sternum. He grabbed the saw and turned it on, hands plunging into the dead man's chest. Hannibal's bangs hung down, blocking his eyes from Will's view. The veins in his forearms flexed as he held the saw in place, cutting through the bone. His back heaved with effort, a thin layer of sweat glistening over his forearms from the humid heat and the physical labor.

Will took another swig of the Bourbon. His free hand slid down into his lap. His fingers grazed over the growing thickness in his pants. He visibly shivered, throwing his head back, watching Hannibal work through his eyelashes. Hannibal did not look up from his work, focused on the corpse under him. Will kneaded his cock through his pants, his soft moans drowned out by the buzz of the saw. Will's fingers began to slip under his waistband, pressing the bottle down hard into his thigh. Hannibal snapped the corpse's sternum, the crack so loud it was audible over the sound of the saw. Will yanked his hand away from his crotch and took a long drink of the Bourbon, drinking it like it was a glass of water given to a parched man. Will swallowed, whiskey flavored saliva thick in his mouth.

Gripping the two pieces of the man's rib cage, Hannibal ripped them apart from each other, his teeth clenched together. His forearms shook as he pried open the man's chest. Once pulled open enough to his liking, Hannibal sat back on his heels. He looked up at Will through his sweaty bangs, his breathing was shallow and heavy. Inhaling deeply to regain control over his breath, Hannibal closed his eyes. His lips barely curled, but when he opened his eyes, they had the essence of a smile.

"What a lovely smell," Will's gaze dropped from Hannibal to the dissected corpse, then back to Hannibal.

"The dead guy smells good to you?"

"If you are dead while simultaneously speaking with me, then you are a medical miracle," A beat of silence.

"You can smell me?" Will hid his reddening face behind the bottle, taking another long drink. Hannibal did not answer. He put the saw down with a smile and took the scissors in his hands again. He cut through the pericardium and pulled it back, finding the man's still heart in his chest. Hannibal looked at Will, holding his heart in a loose grip. Will met his gaze wide eyes, the yellow light of the barn making his eyes look more green than blue. The neck of the bottle was pressed to his lips.

In one fluid motion, Hannibal tore the man's heart out from his chest, using the scissors to snip the pesky visceral fascia that would not tear. Free from its flesh chains and bone cage, Hannibal held the heart out to the dogs to sniff. The third dog, Hawkie, was the first to pad forward, her wet nose wiggling. Opening her muzzle, she took the man's heart delicately in her jaw, like it was a treat. Her tail wagged wildly as she sat down. Hannibal gestured for her to go away. She continued to sit, her tail thumping the ground, the viscera of the heart hanging from her jowls. She stared at Hannibal with deep brown eyes, the little remaining blood from the man's remains staining the white fur of her muzzle red. She pressed the top of her head to Hannibal's thigh.

"She wants you to pet her," Maroon eyes softened. Hannibal peeled the glove off of one hand carefully.

"No need to stain your pretty fur any further," Hannibal placed a hand on top of Hawkie's head, stroking the soft brown and black fur of her head and neck. She leaned into Hannibal's hand for a few pets, her eyes closed in relaxation. Happy with her share of affection, she trotted away to declare a corner her own. Laying down, she dropped the dead man's heart in between her paws as she began to sniff and lick at it.

"Buster likes hands and feet, all the bones give him enough stimulation. Winston likes a good, long femur. Sometimes he'll drag it around like he's drawing something in the mud," Will laughed into the bottle. A smile graced Hannibal's lips as he knelt back down and got back to work. Taking the electric saw in hand, he dismembered the rest of the body. Hands and feet for Buster and a thigh for Winston, just as suggested. Will continued to drink, his free hand clutching the fabric of his pant leg. Even with the saw on, Will did not move his hand.

When the dogs were all happily munching away, Hannibal stood up with the tool in hand, sullied with blood. Both stared down at Hannibal's handiwork, Hannibal looming over him with his chest heaving and Will from where he was perched on the table, bottle in hand. Between them, the corpse lay with its chest flayed open, ribs cracked and spread, cradling the remaining organs. In contrast to the precision of the dissection of the chest, the limbs missing were messily amputated, flesh carved off the remaining bone which protruded a few inches.

Hannibal tossed the tools in his hands to the ground and stripped his hands free from the bloody gloves, throwing them in the corpse's chest cavity. Stepping over the body, he marched over to Will and knocked the chair out from under his feet, his legs swinging as they fell. Hannibal pushed himself in between Will's legs, the tops of his thighs pressing into the edge of the table. Will leaned back, his head hitting the wall. On impact, bits of dust rained down on them.

"Now, now, Doctor Lecter," He held Hannibal's clean shaven face in his palm. "I still don't know if I can trust you,"

"Trust is fickle. Raw, *primal* instincts are the closest semblance of stability that man can ever achieve,"

"Raw, primal instincts," Will repeated the words like they tasted bitter on his tongue, "We can do better than something so trite, don't you agree?" He patted Hannibal's cheek and held up the half-empty bottle in his hands. Accepting the offer, Hannibal took the bottle, bringing it to his nose. Inhaling the aroma of charred oak and honey vanilla, Hannibal locked eyes with Will. He took the edge of the bottle's rim in his lips and tilted the bottle back, letting the alcohol slide down his throat. Will grabbed the bottle back.

"Like I said before. We're in Louisiana. My home means we play by my rules," Will grabbed Hannibal's collar and pulled him close, spewing venom from his lips that brushed against the corner of Hannibal's own. "I've cultivated the Rougarou and the public's image of him. I'm not gonna let some Beau Brummell blow it up because some innocent kid stepped on your fancy French shoes, yeah?" He wasn't asking.

"I will agree to your preferred terms of agreement, Will. But first, you must understand something," Hannibal trailed a hand up Will's spine, gripping the base of his neck. "These are not French. They are Italian leather."

Will shoved him away, concealing his smile with another swig of Bourbon.

Chapter End Notes

Well well well...who was Cassandra talking to on the phone? A wild Freddie has appeared! And Hannibal and Will have an agreement now?

Buckle up, things are starting to heat up (in more ways than one)!

As always, thank you for your support! See you next Tuesday!

Housewife Looks Good On You

Chapter Notes

Hello again! A couple things before we get started.

A couple hours after I posted last chapter, a lovely reader of mine, Hi_Panda, was kind enough to let me know that the part about the quote by Confucius was misattributed and the meaning was off! So, if you saw that version, I ask you kindly to go reread that section of the conversation between Hannibal and Will so you can get updated about what they talked about in the fixed version!

And by all means, if there is an error in anything, please lmk! I'm a one woman team out here, beta-ing my own chapters and I'll miss things. Thanks for doing so!

Apologies for posting this chapter later than I usually do on Tuesdays. This week, I was on vacation and the internet connection was brutal! I could not get my computer to connect for half the week! So this chapter is a bit shorter than they have been! And if it feels rushed because of it, I apologize!

A small TW for some homophobia! There are some obscene comments made, but not much else. I do not endorse anything that comes out of that homophobe's mouth.

We do start to get a little spicy in this chapter! So fun times! And it's just the beginning!

The only other thing is that I felt batshit crazy as I wrote this chapter. Grab your popcorn.

Update (9/5/22); To start this chapter off, my online friend The_Grey_Lady_Weeps did some amazing fanart for this chapter! Check out her amazing work (art and fanfic!) here on AO3!

Alright! I think that's all I needed to say. So, hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mr.
Mrs.
The Grey Lady

Despite all that had transpired at the motel and everything after, the night did not pass quickly. In fact, after their agreement was sealed with finishing the bottle of Bourbon, the two turned in for the night. And Will Graham, in particular, did not have a fond relationship with sleep.

Will lay on the living room couch, a flimsy pillow under his head and his feet cold because of a blanket that did not fully cover his body. He laid still, his breathing even and calm, and his eyes open. He stared towards the direction of the ceiling, which he could not see in the dark and listened to his dogs sleep. Their breathing, the shuffling of limbs, even the occasional, sleepy woofs that came with dogs dreaming. He listened to them carefully.

One came from below him, laying against the bottom of the couch. The other came from the middle of the carpet. The third was not in the living room, but tucked away in Will Graham's bed, which currently, did not hold Will Graham, but held one Dr. Hannibal Lecter. Throughout the night, Will dozed in and out of sleep, not staying asleep for more than 30 minutes at a time. Each time he woke, there were no sounds other than the dogs, as if there was no other person in the house. Like there wasn't a monster in his bed.

Morning did not come soon enough. Will woke at dawn, before the sun had clutched the horizon with her finger-like streams of light to rear her head and propel herself into the morning sky. The clatter of porcelain accompanied by the harmonies of sizzling pans reached Will's ears from behind him. The smells of frying meat and eggs waltzed together into the living room, dancing into Will's nose. Rubbing his eyes with the heels of his hands, Will sat up slowly. Blinking away the burning feeling of tired eyes, Will looked down, locking eyes with Winston who sat at the foot of the couch, his tail wagging lazily. Giving him a soft smile and a good scratch behind the ears, Will stood, stretched, and padded into the kitchen.

Hannibal stood at the stove with his back toward Will.

"Well, isn't this familiar," Will's voice was thick with sleep. He cleared his throat. "I didn't even know I had an apron."

"Cereal is off the menu today. Instead, I have prepared a basic protein scramble. Simple, yet a filling breakfast fit for a busy day." Hannibal looked exactly as he did at the motel last night while he prepared dinner. His posture was perfect, but slack and free from tension. He wielded the pans and cooking utensils as if they were just extensions of his own limbs. An apron was tied practically around Hannibal's waist, but he did not seem to have any mess on him. His clothes and apron he wore remained immaculate. He tossed a bottle in the air, catching it, and pouring some of its contents in the pan. Hannibal rolled the pan around as flames erupted from it. His forearms flexed as he lifted the cast iron pan, holding the flames away from his face. He was comfortable.

"And the protein is?"

"Pork, of course." Will sniffed the air.

"Doesn't exactly smell like bacon in here,"

"Not all cuts of pork smell similar to bacon." Will simply mumbled an affirmative noise, mulling to the coffee pot. It was full of a fresh brew.

"You don't have to hide your odd gourmet palate from me, Doc." Will poured himself a mug and left an empty black one next to the pot. Setting his white mug on the table, Will disappeared into the living room closet while Hannibal finished up cooking. Hannibal poured himself coffee in the plain black mug Will had left out for him. Turning the mug in his hands to inspect it, his eyebrows shot up in amusement. His mug was the spitting image of Will's, only his black while Will's was white. Hannibal peered at the lettering on the other mug.

″ Alright Doc, here's the deal," Will announced, waltzing out of the closet. Hannibal poured the rest into his mug and took a large sip of scalding coffee. "I can't go to work. So we're gonna have to get creative to find the next slimy son of a bitch." Will dropped a journal and a stack of newspapers tied together by twine in the middle of the table. The plates and the utensils clattered softly as they hit each other. Hannibal brought the food from the stove and set it on the table. He began to plate the food.

"After I got shot, I started to compile different names and details I could remember from the records. All the names and whatever charges I could remember are in the journal. The old newspapers are to cross-reference anything that comes up. And this needs to be clean. I can't afford you to screw this up, because as far as I know, no one knows you exist here. So if I go down for something you pull, I guarantee you I will make you wish you'd never set foot in this god-forsaken state. I will tear you a new asshole."

When Will finished his speech, Hannibal stared at him with a fondness that gleamed in his eyes, making them seem brighter red than they actually were. Taking the bundle of newspapers and books off of the table and moving them to the counter, Hannibal came back to sit at the table with Will.

"Sit," He ordered. Will reluctantly obeyed. "We won't get anywhere if neither of us have eaten anything," Will picked up the fork, sat next to his plate and poked at the food. Hannibal ate without hesitation, enjoying the meal he had made for them. Will did not begin to eat and instead picked up his coffee and began to drink it like it was water. Hannibal put his fork down and dabbed his mouth with a napkin, delicately drinking his coffee.

Once Hannibal's plate was empty, Will finally took a bite of his own, having set his coffee down. Will looked at his empty coffee cup and glanced up at the machine across the room. He looked at Hannibal, who stared back at him expectantly.

"What is it? Something on my face?" Will retorted as he leaned back in his chair.

"You have a lovely choice of mugs. Did you kill your wife?" Will laughed. He glanced at his mug. In calligraphic font, it read *Mr.*

"That's absurd, Doc," Will looked at the matching set of mugs. "They're from the thrift store. They sold cheaper in a set." Will quirked his head, reading Hannibal's mug. In matching font, Hannibal's mug read *Mrs.* "Gotta say, housewife looks good on you," Will snorted into his mug. He picked up his fork again and pushed around the food, this time tentatively taking bites with little bits of meat. Hannibal raised a brow as he watched Will eat, clasping his hands under his chin as he observed.

"The Rougarou fancies himself to be a righteous killer. He takes great pride in a strong moral compass. It is unique to only him, fine tuned to his specific magnetic force, not unlike the world's own, but at the same time, it is dissimilar,"

Will scoffed, but continued to chew. "And your point?"

"You did not hesitate in killing that man,"

"Well, you were going to kill him whether I liked it or not. Whether he knew who we were or not," He answered with a full mouth, placing the fork down on the plate.

"You didn't just kill him. You took pleasure in watching me mutilate his corpse,"

"The dogs needed to eat," Will held up one finger. "He was already dead," Will held up another and put his two pointer fingers together, side by side. "It was a simple solution. I wasn't going to incriminate myself even if I didn't approve of your choice, Doctor Lecter. Again, I'm cleaning up your messes."

"That's not the pleasure I'm talking about, sweet Will," Hannibal purred, setting his clasped hands down on the table. Under it, his legs spread a bit wider. Will scowled at the diminutive and against his will, pink crawled up the back of his neck.

"You said you could smell me. Does that mean--"

"Yes, I could smell your arousal as I dismembered that man," Will's chair scooted loudly across the floor as he shot out of his seat. He grabbed the plates on the table and set them in the sink, replacing their place on the table with the journal and stack of newspapers he had retrieved earlier. They hit the table with a heavy thunk.

"We should get to work," Hannibal looked up at Will, who refused to look back at him.

"Are my eyes distracting to you, Will?"

"Very," He nodded curtly and disappeared into the bathroom, slamming the door shut behind him.

Hannibal blinked owlishly as the door slammed shut. Finally standing up from the table, Hannibal cleaned up the rest of their breakfast from the table. Not able to find dish washing gloves, Hannibal did not wash the dishes in the sink, but instead clogged the sink and let them soak.

Hannibal brushed his fingers over the cover of the leather-bound journal Will had retrieved. He opened the cover with a delicate hand, leafing through the pages casually. Hannibal stopped on the fourth page and his eyes darkened. He ran his fingers over Will's scratchy handwriting.

Theriault. Abuse or assault charge. Crippled the fucking dog. Sentence ends August 1st.

August 6th, 2003.

The day Hannibal arrived in New Orleans, he was exhausted. He had driven from Baltimore, the entire drive taking him two days with minimal stops. On his way to his lodging, a local farmer's market caught his eye. Turning at the nearest opportunity to make a U-turn, Hannibal pulled into the area of a field designated for parking. Stepping out of the car, Hannibal prowled the market and ignoring the many odd looks the locals gave him.

He finally stopped at a quaint stand selling mainly watermelons, cantaloupes, and honeydew. Hannibal eyed the prices, taking out his wallet. Fruit was good for a hot day.

"You don't look like a fellow who'd be interested in melons," A beat of silence. Then, Hannibal looked up from the baskets of produce, sweat beading down his forehead despite being outside for so little time.

"Pardon me?" Hannibal watched the lady who had spoken from behind the stand. Her hair was long and white with an essence of strawberry blonde that had not grayed, yet.

"It was a joke, son. You know, *melons*," She gestured to her chest and then to the produce. "The way you're dressed, I'd reckon you're one of them homosexuals," Hannibal looked at her with calculating eyes. She didn't seem to notice as she tripped as she came out from behind the counter. When she didn't fall (let alone break her neck), Hannibal frowned, eyes crinkling in disappointment.

"Oh, get! You filthy animal," A three legged doberman trotted away from her, running towards Hannibal. "Now how dumb are you? When I say get, you don't go bother my customers!" She screeched, grabbing the towel that hung on her shoulder and whipping it at the dog, who ran away again, tongue lolling out of its mouth and panting shallowly.

"Not to worry, the dog is not the bother," Hannibal maintained a polite facade, physically biting his tongue while he was not using it.

"Yeah, well..." She trailed off, looking to the stand where the dog had hid behind. Shaking her head, she refocused her attention on Hannibal. "As I was sayin', I was joshing is all," Using the towel she tried to whip the dog with, she dabbed the sweat off of her brow. "My husband just died. Two days before he was supposed to come back home. Some of us just need something to laugh about,"

Hannibal checked his watch. The lady continued to yap.

"Even if he did come home, I bet all that time he spent without a lady around, he probably became a queer." She shook her finger in the air to no one in particular. "I'm telling ya', without a woman around to meet his needs, he will find them someplace else. And then get all turned around and sick in the head." The first breath she took, Hannibal cut in, preventing her from saying anything else.

"I'm running late for a reservation, may I ask you for your business card? I would like to perhaps further browse your produce another time," The lady shook her head.

"No can do, sugar. I ain't that fancy. The name is Theriault Farm, just outside of New Orleans." Hannibal's eye twitched minutely.

"Well, I thank you for your time. I must be going, now," With a brief, yet polite, handshake, Hannibal was on his way back to his car and back on the road in minutes.

Will slammed the bathroom door shut behind him. Leaning all of his weight against it, he let out a shaky breath. He clamped his own hand over his mouth, groaning into it. He looked down at his

pants, his hardening cock tenting the crotch. His hips twitched against the air, the denim that refused to stretch rubbing against his erection. He inhaled sharply and removed his hand from his mouth to unbuckle his belt and free himself in record time. He bit his bottom lip in an attempt to keep quiet.

Shoving his pants and boxers down halfway his thighs, he shoved his own fingers in his mouth, sucking on them and wetting his palm. He grabbed his cock, wrapping his spit-slicked fingers around the base. Giving a squeeze, he moaned and reached for the wall, bracing himself as his hips bucked again, this time thrusting into the tight grip of his hand. His fingers trailed up his length, slipped over his cockhead, gathering the clear fluid that had started to weep from his slit.

He let out a sharp hiss as he stroked himself, mixing the saliva and precum together and using it as lackluster lube. He watched as he let his hand wander further down his shaft, letting his wet fingers explore the soft skin of his perineum. He shuddered at the delicate touch, his cock throbbing at the loss of stimulation. Letting all his weight fall on the door behind him, he took his hand off the wall and took his dick into his hand again, jerking himself off furiously while his other fingers found his hole, circling his rim. Will slowly pushed in one finger, gritting his teeth at the burn of his under lubricated finger.

A low whine escaped his throat as he worked his finger a knuckle deep into his ass, roughly. He hissed at the burn, but his hand around his dick lost its quick rhythm. He threw his head back, letting the intensity overtake him. His head hit the door with a loud thud, his eyes clenched shut as his cock pulsed in his grip and he reached his climax, cum coating his abs as they clenched. His legs shaking under him, Will slid down the door, removing his finger from his tight hole so he could sit down. Coming down from his high, Will traced the cum on his stomach with his forefinger.

"You're gonna be a problem, aren't you, Doc?" He panted to himself. He sat on the floor, the tile cold against his bare ass. He sat there for several moments, looking at the floor. Will soon got back on his feet and flushed the toilet in an attempt to cover his tracks. He then turned on the faucet, cleaned himself up, and tucked himself away in his pants.

Hannibal's head snapped up at a thunk from the bathroom door. He left the page in the journal and turned to the newspapers, scouring through the new ones. Finding the newspaper from July 30th, Hannibal flipped through the pages until he found the obituaries. He scanned the names of the recently deceased. His finger halted on the page.

Narcisse Theriault

Narcisse passed away at the Louisiana State Penitentiary on July 30th at the age of 82. He is survived by his wife, Rosaline of 65 years.

Services will be held on August 3rd, 4-8 p.m. at The Faucher Funeral Home in New Orleans, LA.

Hannibal separated this page from the rest of the newspaper, which he folded back up and put back in its place. Tearing up the page, Hannibal made his way into Will's bedroom. With the torn shreds of newspaper in one hand, Hannibal stuffed them into the nightstand drawer. Risky, but he would

be sleeping in that room for the time being. At the earliest chance he would get, he would have to burn it.

Coming out of the bedroom, Hannibal heard the toilet flush. Not being close enough get back to the kitchen without running, Hannibal found himself in front of the living room's bookshelves. He picked the book next to the picture of Will and an older man with the same blue eyes. When he opened the book, a clipped article fell out, the paper yellow with age.

The man on the cover image looked like Will, but his hair was cropped short in a buzz cut. Next to him was a young woman, her hair blacker than the ink on the page tied into a sleek bun. Both were dressed in uniform. They had not been posed for the photo. The young man and woman had been caught in a candid shot, their laughter preserved in time. The heading was a whiplash of emotion. He caught the date before the start of the article. September 1994

Detective Shot On Duty! Hero Partner Apprehends Culprit! New NOPD Lieutenant?

The article was ripped from his hands before he could read further.

"I haven't killed you because you've yet to give me a reason that outweighs your usefulness to me. Don't give me one," Will hissed in Hannibal's ear, his chest nearly pressed flush against his back.

"You wound me. I was under the impression you found me interesting. Appealing, even,"

"I'm sure you're quite the ladies' man, Doctor Lecter. But I'm no lady,"

"Sexuality is quite a fluid topic, Will,"

"You don't gotta tell that to me," Will pushed at Hannibal's shoulder. "Now come on, if we're gonna work together we better get started," Before Will could leave, Hannibal reached to grab his hand, wrapping his fingers around his wrist. Turning his hand over, Hannibal placed something in his palm, closing Will's fingers over it.

"If you don't want it, you should burn it," Will looked down at his hand. A lighter sat in his palm. Instead, Will tucked the article away in his pocket to be put back later. Will walked away, leaving Hannibal's back cold without the shared warmth.

"I may have found one you might want to check out already," Hannibal watched Will leaf through the journal at the kitchen table. Will contemplated for a couple moments. Hannibal simply watched him from behind.

"That works well, darlin'. I told Cassandra that your victim was the Rougarou's. They're gonna be looking at every other murder under a microscope. I need to shake things up," Will turned to face Hannibal. "Who caught your eye?"

"On the fourth page in," Hannibal walked over, "You wrote this name. You wrote that this individual crippled their dog. With your affinity for your dogs--"

"--you thought I'd want to go after this bastard first," Will finished for him without looking up. Hannibal swallowed.

"Precisely,"

"Theriault is the name of a farm just outside New Orleans. My father used to take me there when I was a kid. Cheap stuff, but it was good. It was always the same woman who had a stand at the farmer's market in the Louis Armstrong Park." Will recounted, his fingers smudging the penciled letters. "We'll stalk her house later tonight, figure out when she gets home. I'd assume she's gone back to running it the second she got out." Although still morning, Will grabbed a bottle and two glasses from the liquor cabinet.

"You'd hate her," Will poured two shots. "From what I remember, she was a nasty ol' hag,"

Hannibal accepted the shot with a grin. "I'm sure your memory serves you correctly,"

Will smiled softly, "Cheers, sha," They clinked glasses. While Will threw his back, Hannibal sipped his, enjoying the alcohol. Manipulation made everything taste better.

The rest of the day, they sat and planned the death of Rosaline Theriault.

Rosaline Theriault was not fond of others. Grumbling as she shoved her wrinkled hand into her purse and searched for her keys, she huffed and puffed as she stood there, just as she had the entire day. Having finally procured the keys, Rosaline cursed madly, shoving the key to unlock the door.

She struggled with the boxes of unsold fruit in her hands, pushing the door open with her good hip. She hobbled to the kitchen in the darkness without bumping into any furniture or wall. She found the table with ease and set the box of heavy fruit onto the counter, then finally moved to turn on the overhead stove light. Her french-tipped nails found the button and clicked it on like she had every night for years.

She called for the dog, but did not hear a response.

"Damn thing! You'd better not be going deaf too!" As the stove light flickered on, a man was illuminated, sitting on the countertop, in between her and the sink with the dog asleep in his lap. He ran his hands across the old dog's patchy fur calmly. Rosaline Theriault would have screamed, if not for the hand that shot out from the darkness behind her and pressed a rag over her nose and agape mouth.

"Evening, Ms. Theriault," Will smiled brightly, "We've a lot to discuss tonight."

Chapter End Notes

gasp Hannibal? Manipulating and lying? Tsk, tsk, Doctor.

Thanks for reading another chapter! I'm glad you're sticking around :)

As always, thank you for the support! Until next week!

The Death of Marat

Chapter Notes

Another week, another chapter!

I had a lot of fun writing this one (I had to take breaks while writing it, muttering how I was going to Hell)

TW: Lots of violence, something that could be construed as SH (forced) so I want to cover my bases. Just a heads up.

Well, here we go! Have fun reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Heavily pigmented eyelids rippled, the eyes underneath rapidly flitting back and forth. Rosaline blinked open to a squint, her painted lips parting as she let out a groan, shaking her head back and forth. She tried to raise her hand towards her face. It never came, something smooth restraining her wrist. Eyes widening in alarm, the old woman wailed at the sight of leather straps tying her down to her kitchen table.

"I wanted to wait until end of the week, give us time to plan better." Will scratched behind the dog's ears. "But on our way in, I met Sasha here." Will tapped her nametag. It jingled against the other tags that hung on her collar. "So I got to thinkin', that if you did this to her--" He gestured to her missing leg, "--what else would you be capable of?" Will sat back, leaning against the cabinets as he watched Hannibal pick through his medical bag that sat open on the countertop. As he watched, he pet Sasha, who hadn't moved from his lap.

"Ready yet, Doc?"

"All in good time, sweet Will. Please keep our dear host entertained, one must always abstain from becoming a rude guest."

Will gathered the sleeping dog in his arms and carefully hopped off of the counter top. He set Sasha down gently on her bed in the corner of the kitchen, his work boots drumming the slow rhythm of death as he padded across the linoleum floors. Rosaline's eyes flicked over to watch him, every hair standing on end, her skin riddled with goosebumps. She did not move.

"Now, what shall we do with you? I don't think it should be quick, don't you agree?" Rosaline spat in Will's face.

"Go on straight to Hell!" She bit back, her eyes hard and unwavering. Not moving an inch, Will closed his eyes and wiped her saliva off of his cheek. He clenched his teeth, jaw flexing.

"I was gonna just rip off your arm before I killed you, so you could feel her pain." Will grabbed her jaw, holding her wrinkly skin in an iron grip. She did not whimper, but instead stared down her nose at him. "But sometimes, we just can't get what we want," As he let go of her chin, he threw

her face roughly to the side. He didn't walk away, still looming over her as he spoke to the man behind him at the counter.

"I'm getting impatient, Doc." Hannibal held a plastic tube in his gloved hands which he brought up in front of his face, inspecting it. He let out a small huff through his nose, barely audible in the already quiet room.

"I suppose we don't have all night," Hannibal approached the table, medical kit in hand.

"No, we don't. So come on over and join the fuckin' party,"

"Must you use such vulgar language?"

"Why, you gotta *fuckin* ' problem?" Will laced the curse with emphasis, flashing a smile that dripped with smugness. Hannibal pressed a needle point to Will's neck.

"You kill people like me. And what do I prefer, Will?"

"You eat the rude,"

"Very good. With all the filth in your mouth, one would be in their right to question if all that filth impairs your taste,"

"My ability to taste or *how* I taste, darlin'? With all this talk about taste, I'd reckon you want one," Hannibal was silent. The needle pressed against Will's neck, but did not puncture the thin skin of his throat. "Which part of me would you taste first?"

Hannibal dropped the needle away from Will's neck. Instead, he turned his attention to the woman strapped to the kitchen table as if she was in the operating room. Turning to his bag, he procured an IV bag, handling it with care. Will watched as he lifted the woman's arm, unbothered by her screeching and struggling. Will watched intently as he hooked her up to an IV bag filled with clear liquid. He hung it on a cabinet handle above her.

"Let go of me you bastard! Let me go!" She screamed and tried to flail, her arms and legs pulling against the restraints to no avail.

"It is in your best interest to stop moving, Ms. Theriault," Hannibal wrapped his gloved hand over the IV bag, squeezing it. "You soon will not be able to at all. If you stop voluntarily, you might feel as though you have some control in how you die," He gave her a pat on the shoulder and turned his attention away.

"Although uncommon," Hannibal began to narrate, "It is possible to intubate a conscious patient." He looked at his bag again, this time grabbing an endotracheal tube and a laryngoscope. "I've first administered paralytics, which will include the paralysis of her diaphragm."

"Meaning she won't be able to breathe on her own," Hannibal perked up, looking at Will who now stood opposite from him, on the other side of the table.

"Precisely," He nodded with a smile, then rounded to the end of the table. He grabbed Rosaline by the head, tilting it back. Her limbs had already begun to stiffen, twitching as she tried to fight. Pulling open her jaw, Hannibal inserted the laryngoscope, guiding it towards the back of her mouth.

"Typically, paralytics are administered simultaneously with anesthetics. This evening--,"

"Typically?" Will cut him off. Hannibal grinned.

"Yes. Tonight, I have only given Ms. Theriault a paralytic drug. Specifically a special succinylcholine cocktail." Hannibal raised her epiglottis with the tool's dull blade and advanced the tube into her larynx. Drool dribbled down Rosaline's chin, her eyes brimming with tears.

"And no anesthetic," Will concluded. Hannibal pushed the tube into her trachea.

"Correct again. Ms. Theriault will feel everything that will be done to her tonight." Rosaline gurgled around the tube, tears falling down her temples. Hannibal removed the laryngoscope and held the tube in place.

"If you would, please tape this to the side of her mouth," Hannibal gestured to a roll of surgical tape sitting next to the other instruments in a neat line. Will tore off a piece and took the tube from Hannibal's hands, allowing him to walk away.

While Will taped the tube to her mouth he leaned down, faces near centimeters away.

"Tonight will be a night to remember. Not that you will, but what a way to go out. You should feel lucky," He ran a gloved hand through her hair. Unable to move, she simply stared at him through her tears.

"She must be awake and aware to experience such an enviable end. Which means she needs to breathe, sweet Will," He looked up at Hannibal who gently chided him as he returned with a resuscitation bag. Expertly hooking it up to the tube, Hannibal began to ventilate the bag, controlling her breathing. The bulging veins on the back of hands flexed as he rhythmically pumped the bag every few seconds.

"Now we may begin," Hannibal looked to his tools set up on the counter. "Please, pick a blade you would like to use." Will ambled over, his hand hovering over the selection as he considered.

"None of these will work," When Will turned around, he met Hannibal's gaze with ease and a bright grin sparkling in the dim light of the kitchen. "I have a better idea," Without another word, Will walked out of the kitchen. Hannibal was left next to the paralyzed woman. He continued to ventilate her without skipping a breath as he waited.

When Will returned only a few moments later, he held up a small blade that reflected the dim, yellow stove-light.

"We've already changed up how I like to do things. We are killing you just days after the last full moon. But, for you and what you've done," Will glanced over at Sasha, who slept soundly in the corner. "Why don't we make things interesting," Standing back at Rosaline's motionless form, Will untied one of her wrists and put the blade in between her thumb and forefinger, pressing it tight in her grip. Hannibal's eyes gleamed once he had a better view. Will had found a razor blade.

"Doctor Lecter, would you like to know how forensics can help us distinguish self-inflicted wounds from defensive wounds?" Will lifted Rosaline's freed wrist, keeping her fingers tight around the blade. Hannibal's eyes widened as he stared, entranced by Will's movements. He swallowed frantically.

"I am always eager to garner new knowledge on a variety of subjects," Will caught Hannibal's gaze only to flash a wink, immediately looking back down to his work.

"You're the ever curious student, aren't you darlin'?" He guided Rosaline's hand to her other wrist, making her press the razor blade to her own skin. "The injuries tend to be cuts on places easy to reach," His cadence was slow and his voice quiet, drawing out each word as he focused. Will dragged Rosaline's hand across the wrinkled skin of her wrist. Blood bloomed as the skin split open before their eyes, trailing in the wake of the blade's edge.

"The important part--" Will lifted her hand away from her wrist. "--is that the cuts are superficial," Will gestured for Hannibal to take a look. Handing the ventilation bag to Will, Hannibal untied her other limp wrist from the constraints and lifted her arm to inspect the bleeding wound.

"I would think the number of these wounds would also be a helpful indicator," Hannibal postulated, holding Rosaline's other wrist to face Will.

"Bingo," Will handed the bag back to Hannibal, who pumped oxygen into her lungs with one hand and held her bleeding arm up to Will. He brought the blade down again on her wrist. Beneath them, Rosaline's face was wet, her eyes overflowing with tears. Her eyes did not move, stuck staring at the ceiling. A small puddle of tears had begun to form on either side of her head.

"Other details that suggest self-inflicted wounds could be that the clothes are not damaged in the process." Another cut of the blade. "Maybe by blood, but we wouldn't cut through her clothes." Another cut. "So when we stage her," Another. "Be careful not to snag any fabric."

Will lifted the blade up to the light, admiring the crimson as it contrasted the shining silver of the sharpened metal edge.

"And the motive behind her death?" Hannibal pumped another breath into her lungs.

"Convicts often find it difficult to assimilate once they get home. Besides," Will took the blade from her hands and into his own. He brought it against her skin. This time, he cut deeper, from her wrist all the way across her forearm. He repeated the same cut on her other arm. Yanking the IV out of her arm, Will laid another cut, hiding the needle mark. Finally done, he set the blade down next to Rosaline's limp hand.

"Some people can never get over what they've done, no matter how long ago it happened. Guilt is funny like that." Will looked up from the bloody mess he had made to find Hannibal staring at him, simply enamored.

Hannibal lunged towards Will, grabbing his cheeks in both hands and pulling his face to have his eyes look into his own, both of them leaning over the table and the dying woman underneath them. Will stared stubbornly into Hannibal's eyes, breathing heavily through his bared teeth, his chest heaving with each inhale. Hannibal leaned closer, his eyes bright with wonder. Will's wild eyes flickered down to his lips, then back to Hannibal's eyes in a blink.

"What a magnificent beast you are. My sweet boy," Hannibal leaned down to capture his lips, licking into Will's mouth, who immediately retaliated. Will pushed Hannibal backwards, breaking their kiss and leaving him to stare with his mouth agape in bewilderment. Walking around the table, Will pushed him again by his shoulders as soon as he reached him and then once more, shoving him backwards until his back slammed into something. The old wood of the cabinets groaned in protest as Hannibal fell into them.

"My rules, Doctor Lecter," Will pinned Hannibal against the cabinets, taking Hannibal's mouth with his own in another kiss. Will pushed a leg in between Hannibal's, pushing upwards into his crotch.

Will trailed down, pressing his lips to the underside of Hannibal's jaw. Nipping at the soft, clean-shaven skin, Will wrapped his lips around the spot and sucked on it. Hannibal threw his head back, smacking against the cabinets, his mouth open as he fought against the breathy moans that escaped from his lips. Will released his skin from his teeth, leaving Hannibal with a livid bruise. "Remember that," His voice was but a breathy whisper brushing against Hannibal's jaw. Pushing away, he left Hannibal who was still pressed up against the cabinets.

Back at the table, Rosaline lay as they left her, but surrounded by two pools of blood that had dripped onto the floor under her arms. Will brought two fingers to Rosaline's throat, He checked her pulse.

"She's dead. We need to stage her and clean up." Will unstrapped her legs and removed the leather bindings from the table. He stuffed them back into his own bag. Without looking back to Hannibal, he huffed and rolled his eyes. "You gonna help or what darlin'?" Hannibal straightened his clothes, adjusted the bulge in his pants, and trotted after Will to help.

"Everyone, meet Sasha," Will let the dogs in from the back porch. Immediately, they ran to the crate in the living room, all three shoving their noses into any hole they could find. As they rushed around, tripping over each other, they pushed against the crate, greeting their new friend. Smiling as they got to know Sasha's scent from the safety of her crate, Will checked their food and water bowls as he brought them back inside from the porch. The food bowls were licked clean. Will refilled their water bowls and set them down inside.

Will ran a hand through his curls that were still wet from the shower. Resting his hands on his hips, he surveyed the room. Satisfied with everything as it should be, he shut the ceiling light in the kitchen and the living room lamp, cloaking the majority of the house in darkness. Checking both the front and back doors were locked, Will entered his bedroom and peeled off his shirt that clung to his damp back. He flung it onto the chair that sat against the wall. He stripped off his pants as well and added to a small pile of old clothes.

The sound of the bathroom fan traveled into the bedroom for a moment after the bathroom door opened. It was shut off after a moment. Shortly after, the bedroom door pushed open. Now only in his boxers, Will turned towards the door. He locked eyes with Hannibal, only a towel wrapped around his waist. Dropping his eyes from Hannibal's, Will's eyes raked over his body, Adam's apple bobbing.

"Apologies, Will," Hannibal's voice was hoarse. "I assumed you had fallen asleep on the couch." Hannibal looked away from Will's chest, backing up and grabbing the handle to close the door again.

"No," Will locked their eyes again. "Come in. *Now* ," Will ordered, leaning against the bed frame. Hannibal obeyed, stepping into the room with silent steps. "Shut the door behind you," Will bit his tongue when Hannibal complied again. "Closer," Will beckoned. Hannibal came closer, stopping a few feet away from Will. The towel slung low on his hips, fine dark hair trailing underneath the stark white towel. Will placed his hands on Hannibal's shoulders, still hot and damp from the shower. He stroked the skin with his thumbs.

"What would you like, Will?" Hannibal whispered. Will pushed down, shoving Hannibal down to his knees.

"I want to fuck your throat until it's so raw you can't speak," Will snarled, his fingers brushing Hannibal's bangs out of his eyes. He let go of his towel, letting it loosen as he knelt in front of Will. He blinked up at him, his long fingers running up Will's thigh. He slipped his fingers underneath the fabric, brushing the supple skin of his inner thigh.

"Have you taken pleasure at the thought of me?" Hannibal's voice was but a whisper in the dark room. Will's hand toyed with Hannibal's hair, his breath sharp as Hannibal's fingers brushed against his cock underneath the fabric. "Have you ached heavily in your hand while you wished it was mine?"

Will grabbed a fistful of hair and twisted, pulling Hannibal's face flush against his clothed cock.

"I said I wanted to fuck your face, darlin'," Will drawled in an almost moan, "Now get to work." Hannibal inhaled deeply, his nose pressed against his crotch. Without another word, Hannibal removed his hand from underneath Will's boxers and yanked them down by the waistband. Will's cock bobbed free, already wet with precum.

Wrapping his fingers around the base of his dick, Hannibal slowly licked from the base to the tip, swirling his tongue around the pink head, tasting him. Will looked down at him, his hand curling around the bed frame. Hannibal groaned as Will pulled at his hair again.

"Get to it," Will urged through his groaning. Hannibal looked up at Will through his thick lashes, eyes burning red as he took Will into his mouth, his fingers straying towards the soft skin of his balls. He slid his wet tongue underneath the head of his dick, heavy on his mouth. He began to suck at the head, letting it go with a pop. Will pressed his hips forward at the loss of contact, hissing as the cold air hit his wet cock.

Hannibal surged forward, taking Will into his mouth and relaxing his throat as he took him deeper. Will threw his head back, moaning loudly. Hannibal stroked Will's shaft with his tongue as he gave a few experimental bobs. He let go once more, merely flicking at his cockhead with his tongue.

"You fuckin' tease," Will thrusted forward, Hannibal taking his dick into his mouth again, his hands grabbing Will's ass as he anchored himself. Will's ass flexed in Hannibal's large palms as he fucked into his wet mouth. Hannibal groaned loudly, Will picking up the pace as the vibration from his throat stimulated his cock. Hannibal croaked Will hit the back of his throat, his head yanked around by his hair as his mouth was fucked with abandon. Hannibal kneaded Will's ass as he rutted into his mouth, spreading his ass cheeks and tracing his rim with two fingers.

"F-fuck!" Will grunted, his hips snapping faster into Hannibal's mouth. "Christ, you take it all so well," Will panted, "You've fuckin' done this before, you filthy slut," Hannibal sputtered around Will's cock, whining as he continued to take him. Will let go of the bed frame, both hands grabbing the back of Hannibal's head, fingers curling around his dark hair as his back arched and his gut tightened.

With one last thrust, Will came in Hannibal's mouth, his knees buckling as his cum shot into his mouth and down his throat. Releasing him from his mouth, Hannibal licked his spit-slicked swollen lips, staring up at Will, who returned his gaze through half-lidded eyes. Hannibal worked his oversensitive head with his tongue, pressing it flat on the underside of his cockhead and licking at it languidly. Will growled, yanking Hannibal up to his feet by his hair. The towel around his waist fell

to the ground. Grabbing him by the nape of his neck, Will pulled Hannibal down into a messy kiss, stealing a lick into his mouth to taste himself on his lips. Their lips smacked loudly as Will pulled away.

"You swallowed. You did well, darlin'. Let me get you some water or somethin'," Will pushed himself off of the bed frame.

"Stay here, my sweet," Hannibal placed a gentle hand on Will's bare chest, guiding him to sit on the bed and lay back against the propped up pillows. "I will bring us both some." Hannibal brought Will's blankets over him, ensuring he was tucked in well. Placing a kiss on his forehead, Hannibal slipped on a pair of Will's worn slippers and headed to the kitchen, leaving the bedroom door ajar.

Grabbing the Mr. and Mrs. mugs, Hannibal filled them both with water, but slipped a pill into only one of them. Hannibal watched as it dissolved into the water, tilting his head back to look at the patterns of shadows and light that danced on the ceiling, soft moonlight beaming through the kitchen windows. Looking back down, he watched the moonlight reflect across the water in the mugs. Just as the light had shone on the river the night they had met. Picking up Will's mug, Hannibal held it over the sink. He tilted it, the drugged water threatening to pour out and down the drain. With a shaky exhale, Hannibal brought the mug back upright and grabbed his own.

"Darling," Hannibal called as he made his way back to the bedroom. Pushing open the door with his forearm, he smiled at Will, who still lounged against the propped up pillows, the blankets barely covering his hips and leaving his naked chest and abdomen on display. Hannibal licked his lips, his mouth suddenly dry.

"I don't want anything to drink anymore," Will's hand played with the trail of hair on his navel, tracing circles on his skin. "I could be in the mood to swallow this time," Despite Will's advances, Hannibal still handed him the mug.

"It is very important to stay hydrated. Please, drink the water. Then, we will see how you feel about other, more enjoyable activities," Grabbing the mug from Hannibal. He locked eyes with Hannibal while he swallowed the first sip.

"A little more, darling," He urged.

"Doctor's orders?" Will muttered around the rim of the mug. Hannibal smiled brightly. Rolling his eyes, Will drank the rest of the water in the mug at once, setting his mug down on the bedside table in a flourish.

"Now," Will wrapped a hand around Hannibal's neck, pulling him down to kiss. Hannibal reciprocating, the two making out. Will straddled Hannibal, grinding against his naked, half-hard cock. Will slowed eventually, becoming less responsive by the minute. As Will passed out, Hannibal caught him in his arms before he could fall to the side, laying him gently in the bed.

Hannibal slid out from under the covers and opened the nightstand drawer. Fishing out the obituary he had hidden, he left the bedroom again. Sliding open the kitchen window, Hannibal opened the kitchen cupboards, searching many before he finally found a lighter. Hannibal clicked his tongue at the pack of cigarettes that sat beside it. Taking the paper obituary and the lighter to the sink, Hannibal lit the corner of it, watching as the article that announced the death of the convict Narcisse Theriault burned. As the flame licked at his thumb and forefinger that held the page, Hannibal dropped it in the sink and turned on the faucet. He watched as the burnt article's ashes were washed down the drain.

"Detective Will Graham. Leave a message. Bye. *At the tone, please record your message. When you are finished, hang up or press--"* Cassandra slammed the phone back onto the receiver. Sitting back in her chair with a huff, Cassandra looked out at the bullpen through the windows. Everything was dark, the only light coming from the bright fluorescent bulbs in her office. She did not bother looking at the clock. It was late, the entire precinct empty but her. She rubbed her face, then clasped her hands over her nose and mouth to look down at the photos and documents spread out before her on the desk.

A photo of a double homicide, dated ten years ago. A Florentine couple murdered and subsequently staged like a painting. The young woman all but bare, draped in a white lace robe. Her head pillowed in her pale blonde hair and flowers in her mouth, held in between her soft palate and gray lips. As she looked back with eyes glazed in white, she stared at the man behind her. His pale arms encircled her waist, capturing her, his entire body sheathed in gray fabric as he looked down upon her. His face contorted into something ugly as he chased after her in death.

Cassandra's eyes drifted from the photo of the double homicide to the photo beside it-- a photo of Botticelli's *Primavera* . Underneath both were the translated detective's notes.

Wiping a tear from her face, Cassandra opened a drawer and grabbed a different folder. Leaving her office, Cassandra let herself into the conference room. Staring at the evidence board in front of her, Cassandra looked at the man's body from only a few nights ago. The dead man who sat in the tub as if he was bathing, holding a bloody note in one hand and a quill in the other that rested in the mud. She ripped the photo off of the board and threw it on the table. She opened the folder from her desk, its only contents was a photocopy. A photocopy of a painting that matched perfectly with the dead man in the tub. She read the art history article attached to it.

"Jacques- Louis David. The Death of Marat," Grabbing a marker from the center of the table, Cassandra labeled the empty folder, *Il Mostro di Firenze* . Cassandra stared at the folders in front of her. Two different folders for two different killers.

"You motherfucker."

Chapter End Notes

Lol, let me know what you think!

I love reading the comments.

Thank you for the kudos, bookmarks, and comments! I love all the support you all have shown this fic.

Until next time! Cheers!

He's Been Dead For Nine Years

Chapter Notes

Welcome back! Things are picking up!

This chapter is VERY dialogue heavy. Buckle up!

Happy reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I lied, my sweet William." Hannibal stroked Will's cheek with his index finger, his breathing slow and even as he drifted further into a drug induced sleep. "If the time comes and you find out, I hope you will understand why I had to do what had to be done," Hannibal blinked lazily as he watched Will sleep beside him. "You will soon see yourself as you truly are and you will weep in delight."

Hannibal twirled his fingers around in Will's hair, brushing the brown curls off of his forehead. His long fingers trailed down to the nape of his neck, playing with his baby hairs, then to the bare skin of his shoulders. He traced his fingertips along the clusters of freckles splattered across the pale undersides of his arms, where the sun had not reached.

Turning onto his back, Hannibal stared up at the ceiling. When he closed his eyes, sleep did not immediately take him. Opening an eye at the sounds of soft grunts, Hannibal peered over to the man sleeping beside him. Sweat beaded on his collarbone and already dripping down his brow. His face contorted, his body closing in on itself. Hannibal removed himself from the bed and retrieved towels from the closet. He sat on the edge of Will's side of the bed. When Hannibal placed a gentle hand on Will's back to lift him, he found the material underneath wet with sweat. Hannibal placed the towel underneath his back, setting him down gently. He wiped his hand wet with Will's sweat on the towel. Taking the hand towel from the pile he had grabbed, Hannibal continued to sit by Will's side, dabbing the sweat from his forehead.

Will slept on, trapped in mind and unable to wake.

When Will Graham eventually woke the sun had long since risen. This was peculiar because he had slept through the night, without waking even once. Will did not move once he awoke. He peeked open his eyelids, watching the sun filter in through the broken window blinds. Turning his head to the side, he caught sight of another man sleeping beside him. Hannibal's chest rose and fell rhythmically. His bangs fell in front of his face, his dark bangs spread across his high cheekbones and tickled the sharp profile of his nose. Will curled up onto his side, his back facing the man. Hannibal's breathing did not falter.

He was in his bed. Hannibal was also in his bed. No one in the room had died.

He slid a leg out from under the covers slowly, careful not to ruffle the sheets. Releasing himself from the cocoon of his bed, As he stood with back still facing Hannibal, he stumbled, smacking his heel into the edge of the bed.

"Shit," He half-exclaimed, his tongue heavy in his mouth. Catching his balance, he began to stretch, Hannibal's eyes opened. He watched Will's naked from behind as various joints popped and cracked, his body groaning in protest. Will paid careful attention to his injured shoulder, gentler with that arm's stretches.

Hannibal's eyes trailed Will as he found his discarded clothes from the night before, just throwing on his boxers. Will opened the dresser drawer and pulled out a white t-shirt. Hannibal frowned and let his eyes drift shut. Will left the room. Pulling the bedroom door shut behind him, he staggered towards the bathroom.

Locking the door, he stripped out of his shirt and boxers and started the shower. Waiting for the water to warm up, he braced himself on the bathroom sink. He stared at the mirror, gazing into his own eyes. He brought his hand up to his face, feeling the scratchiness of the stubble. He continued to touch his face, tracing his profile as if he was reassuring himself that his face was still there. His fingers reached the bone of his temple. He pressed against the outer corner of his eye, feeling the edge of bone underneath the thin layer of skin and muscle. He pushed in, feeling the hollow socket underneath.

He pulled his hand away and yanked the faucet on, splashing his face with freezing cold water. Again. And again. And again.

He stared at the bottom of the sink, watching the water drip from his hair and skin. Having better control of his limbs, Will slipped behind the shower curtain, falling under the scalding hot waterfall of a steam filled cavern.

Will emerged from the bathroom not so soon after he had entered. However, his hair was not dripping wet, but it had still plastered itself to his reddened skin. He had thrown his clothes back on, the white t-shirt darkened in the places he had not adequately toweled dry. He found Hannibal standing in front of the bookshelf, already dressed for the day. He held a stack of papers, bound by a heavy duty clip, which he leafed through. Sasha laid at his feet, looking up at him with wide eyes, her tail wagging lazily.

"A monograph I'm working on," Will stood in the doorway to the bathroom, his hands loose to his sides.

"Interpreting time of death using insect activity." Hannibal looked up from the page, bookmarking it with his thumb.

"It's just a draft," Will approached Hannibal, but crouched down to pet Buster, who was sprawled out on his bed, half-asleep.

"There is no such thing as a perfect first draft, sweet Will," Hannibal countered, flipping through the pages.

"Why do you do that?" Will gave the dog one last scratch behind the ears, then stood up again, plucking the manuscript from Hannibal's hands. He placed it back on the shelf behind the picture frame.

"I do many things for a variety of reasons, much like all people,"

"You don't see yourself like other people, Doctor Lecter. Don't get smart with me," Hannibal quirked his head at the scolding.

"Then ask me again, *sweet Will* ,"

"That." Will pointed directly at him. "That right there. Why do you call me that?" Will squinted, but his gaze did not harden. The look in his eyes was something between curiosity and suspicion.

"They are the words of a beautiful language many have long-since forgotten." Will's tongue flicked at his bottom lip, his hands on his hips as he scoffed, his eyes rolling. He rubbed his hand over his mouth.

"Don't get cute with me," He turned around. The dogs perked up when he crossed into the kitchen, Sasha last to do so.

"I would never do anything of the sort," While Hannibal stood tall as he spoke with an unwavering voice and a heavy gaze, Will simply scoffed.

"Fine, don't tell me then. You could just say that, you know."

"You are not a pig to be hunted, Will," Hannibal strode up to Will's side in only a few long, self-assured strides.

"Because I protected you, then? Because we're stuck in this together now, you want to play nice?" Will placed a hand on the doorknob to the back door. The dogs stood, stretching their limbs as they sauntered into the kitchen. Sasha sat next to Hannibal, looking up at him again, her nose wiggling.

"That is a factor, but not the main reason." Hannibal grabbed Will's wrist, preventing him from opening the door. Will glared at him.

"Why, then? You act all high and mighty, like you're God's gift to the world. So, you take innocent people's lives in your hands and decide if they live or die. You'd kill them for something so petty, like giving you the wrong amount of change." Will pulled his hand free of Hannibal's grip, pushing him away. "But the truth is, Doctor Lecter, I bet you are getting bored. You like someone bossing you around, but you can't fuckin' admit it. That's why you drugged me last night, didn't you?"

Hannibal raised his head, the muscle in his jaw tightening at the accusation. His lips curled back, twitching as he snarled. But, he didn't respond, but Will went at him again.

"You were so afraid of losing control, you needed to do something to convince yourself you still had it! But, guess what?" Will uttered the question harshly, his voice dropping deep as he let his accent pour out of his mouth like honey laced with arsenic.

"You sure seemed to have the time of your life when I held your head in my hands, fucking your face so hard you couldn't breathe," Will growled, his eyes dark blue like the ocean in the night. Hannibal just stared, schooling his face of emotion.

"Jesus Christ, just say something!" Will pushed his chest again, the space between his brows wrinkled as he yelled.

"Have you ever studied the bayou after a rainstorm?" Will looked at him with tired eyes and raised a furrowed brow. "Think back to the night of our first encounter," Hannibal gestured for Will to sit, pulling out a chair from under the table. Reluctantly, Will moved towards the chair. Hannibal pushed him down into it, then placed his hands on Will's shoulders.

"Please, close your eyes. Conjure the memory of our first meeting," Will's eyelids tentatively fluttered shut.

"Inhale," Hannibal's hushed voice lingered in the air, his mouth close to Will's ear. "What is it that you smell?"

"Everything is damp. I can smell the humidity. It's suffocating, like I can taste the air in the back of my throat," Will croaked out. Hannibal began to rub Will's shoulders, gently rolling them back and forth. Will's face gradually began to relax.

"What do you feel around you?" Hannibal squeezed Will's shoulders, pressing and pulling at the muscle.

"My shoulder burns. My feet are sinking in the mud, like they're rocks. Everything is wet. It's so hot and humid, but it's so wet that there's a chill in my bones." Will's muscles tensed under Hannibal's touch, quaking as the memory surfaced in his mind's eye.

"Now tell me, what is it that you see?" Hannibal pressed his thumbs between Will's shoulder blades, pressing down as he massaged the tightness out of his muscles.

"Blood." Will's voice was but a whisper. "It shines black in the moonlight. The water is darker than the sky, the river is flooded. The trees..." He trailed off.

"What about the trees, sweet Will?" Will's brow furrowed again. "What do you see?" Hannibal prodded once more, his fingers digging deep into Will's back.

"The wind is picking up. There's a flash of lightning. Another storm is on its way,"

"And when the gift of Zeus fell upon us, he helped the moon illuminate the dark of the night. Isn't that right?"

"Yes," A mere murmur.

"What did you see, sweet William?"

"I saw new life. It was everywhere. There were trees that had been struck down, uprooted from the ground. But...," Will paused. Hannibal's hands moved, now focused on kneading the muscle of his injured shoulder. Will leaned forward, his chest pressed against the dull edge of the table. He groaned out loudly.

"...the survivors looked healthier. Greener. They were given new life," Will whimpered, Hannibal's thumb pressed into his healing bullet wound. Will cried out, pressing himself further into the table.

"When God dabbles in destruction, He brings beauty into the world. By this logic, since we are created in His image, who is to deny that man can do the same?" Hannibal whispered in Will's ear, then nipped at the supple skin just behind. Hannibal let go of Will's wound, his hands finding their way back to the base of Will's neck. He massaged the muscle lightly.

"What is God's will? His intention? When you think about the consequences of all actions, His actions, that take place in the world, what is His real purpose? We can't ever claim to know His will. We would be fools to act like we knew," Will jostled his shoulders, knocking Hannibal's hands off of him. He stood up and grabbed his phone off of the counter.

"You are my Will," Hannibal's lips quirked upwards in amusement. Will tsked at him, powering his phone on.

"Too corny for you. It doesn't suit you, darlin',"

"No, it does not." He agreed.

"We should start Sasha on a raw diet," Will looked to the dog still at Hannibal's side. She had not moved, still sitting and looking at Hannibal, who did not acknowledge her presence.

"When the Rougarou chooses his victims, what does he see?"

"Still trying to change the subject, I see," Will checked his phone. There was a missed call. "They don't deserve to live, but not for the petty reasons you have."

"Who doesn't, Will?"

"She doesn't." Will whirled around. "Don't psychoanalyze me." He ordered, storming out of the kitchen and whistling for the dogs. They perked up, running out the door after him. Sasha followed the others, curious. They followed him out the door, flying off the porch and into the grass to play. Dialing the familiar number, Will brought his phone to his ear.

"This is Captain Cassandra Poirier," She greeted, laughing at the voice over the phone. She tucked her feet into her slippers under her desk.

"Yes, no longer Lieutenant. I made Captain just about 3 years ago." Captain Poirier beamed, a smile on her face. She took a sip of water from her glass, thanking the other person on the phone in response to their congratulations.

"You know, I don't drink anymore, so please, tell them to have a drink for me," She picked up the token on her desk, fiddling with it.

"I'd like to ask a favor. There's been a series of serial murders out here in Baton Rouge and--" She sighed as she was cut off, listening to their answer before she could even ask her question.

"I know what I told the press. My best detective said the same thing. The Rougarou is escalating and probably starting to get paranoid, too." She rattled on, the token tumbling around her fingers faster. "But, I have a hunch and you of all people know that a gut feelin' is not something to be ignored," She waited with baited breath.

"Thank you! What I need is for you to please let me know if there are any cases in your database that match this M.O. I've emailed you. Immediately let me know if anything comes up. I've been dealing with this son of a bitch since April and I know for a fact that you don't want him to come

on down to New Orleans. So you will talk to me and if anything comes up, I want to have access to the crime scene. I know the Rougarou and I'll be honest. I don't think he's alone anymore." She set the token down, tapping the desk. She deflated, her shoulders caving in.

"Yes, I know the anniversary is coming up," Cassandra played with the curly phone wire. She looked at the picture frames decorating her office, bright blue eyes staring back at her. "That has nothing to do with how I'm feeling about this. I have the facts and an M.O. that is distinct from the Rougarou that has already been documented." She huffed, pinching the bridge of her nose.

"Look, I'm doing fine, better than past years, even. And Will's doing great. Just saw him the other day, as a matter of fact. So, don't you dare for a second think that Eddie has anything to do with this. Ed Graham is dead. He's been dead for nine years. So don't you dare insinuate that what happened to him is clouding my judgment. So, you *will* let me know if anything pops up." She held her breath, "Thank you." She forced a polite tone. "It was nice talking to you, too. Have a good one." Hanging up the phone with a long and heavy sigh, Cassandra sat back in her chair, swiveling back and forth. She traced the calendar that lay flat on her desk. September would be arriving soon.

Her cellphone rang. She slid open her desk drawer and grabbed her personal cell. She picked up.

"Hello?"

"Cas," Will's voice was rough, "What did you need? My phone was off when you called last night."

Cassandra looked at the two different folders sitting on top of her desk.

"I--," She hesitated, "I called because we haven't gotten anywhere with the Rougarou." She lied. "The second victim from that night, the one missing the legs," She clarified, "We interviewed friends, family, coworkers. Even neighbors. This guy was squeaky clean. So, I'm calling to see if you have given it any further thought."

A sigh from the other line.

"Cas. You have the profile I wrote up. Remember, you're the one who put me on leave. I'm not my father, Cas."

"I know that Will." She kept her voice level.

"Do you? You put me on indefinite leave. And you expect me to still work? Hell, I might as well come grab all my shit, work from home."

"You know what?" Cassandra looked at the desk calendar. "Then your leave is over August 31st. I want you in the precinct on September 1st. 8 o'clock sharp." Will was silent for a moment. Cassandra checked her phone to make sure the call did not drop.

"Up until this point, his motives have been predictable. All the victims have criminal records. That is not the case anymore. He's getting worse, Cas. Even getting bolder with the crime scenes,"

"We've known this Will. It's as if he's completely switched it up."

"That's my point. The Rougarou's motives have changed." The line was silent. Cassandra pursed her lips. "Cas? You there?"'

"You really think it's just the Rougarou?" Cassandra's fingers brushed over the new profile, tracing the letters of the word, *Firenze* .

"I'm sure of it. Find his new motive, and we'll start getting somewhere. Goodbye, Cas," She heard shuffling in the background.

"Wait, Will,"

"... Yes?" She smiled warmly, her eyes grim.

"How are you doing? I know Septembers are hard for you. For the both of us, really. If you ever want to talk about him, the good and the bad, I hope you know I'm here for you."

The line went dead.

Will crept back into the house, shutting the patio door quietly. Sliding off his shoes to remain quiet, he padded into the living room. Hannibal sat on the upholstered chair, one leg thrown over the other with the manuscript draped over his leg. He sat still as he read with a red pen in hand, poised. He only moved occasionally when he marked something on the page, his script small and neat.

Will shrugged from where he leaned against the support beam that jutted out of the wall.

"Like I said, it's a work in progress," Will stepped closer, like a wolf stalking a rabbit. "But that's not what you were looking for, earlier. Not what you were hoping to find," Slowly, Will made his way next to Hannibal. Looking at the shelves, Will ran his fingers over the spines of the books, stopping in the space between La Plante's *Prime Suspect* and Virgil's *Aeneid* . He pushed the two apart enough to reveal a single page of yellowed newspaper. Turning to Hannibal, Will placed the article on top of the page Hannibal had open. He walked away for a moment, letting Hannibal skim over the text as he was gone.

Will opened the patio door again to let the dogs in, immediately returning to the living room with a glass of water. He sat down on the couch and patted the space beside him. Sasha ran up beside Hannibal, jumping on her hind legs to place her only front paw on his thigh, whining. Hannibal reached down to pet her head gently and push her off.

Sasha followed him to the couch. She laid down on top of Hannibal's feet, looking up at him with wide, brown eyes. Hannibal patted her head again, her tail wagging back and forth as he stroked her fur. He looked to Will, who sat leaning forward, his elbows resting on his knees. He took a sip of water. Staring ahead at the black screen of the television against the wall, Will turned his neck, cracking his neck to relieve some of the tension. Will rubbed his thumb across the rim of the glass. He gestured to the article Hannibal held in his hands.

"Let me tell you about Cassandra,"

Chapter End Notes

Will being a little shit? Check! Hannibal not letting Will get a rise out of him? Errr, not sure about that one!

What really happened between Will and Cassandra? We'll see next week! Woohoo! Very exciting!

Hope you enjoyed! Drop a comment, lmk what you think! Until next time...Peace!

I Work Here, Kid

Chapter Notes

Welcome back!

This chapter is longer than the others, but not by that much (yep, I added a big fat angst tag).

Now onto the chapter... about Cassandra... what is her deal?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

September 10th, 1980

On her first day of work as a Detective, Cassandra Poirier arrived at the New Orleans Police Department early that morning. She had arrived so early, in fact, that no one else had entered the building except the custodians, who had been kind enough to let her in. She heaved the cardboard box full of her belongings onto her new desk. It hit the fake wood with a thud.

Wiping the sweat from her brow, she grabbed a stray piece of scrap paper from her belongings, fanning herself. She looked around the squad room. There were three other desks. One sat in front of hers, facing each other. The other two were set a couple of feet away, leaving a path that led to the Captain’s office.

Footsteps pattered down the hallway. Cassandra set her makeshift fan down, turning to the doorway. The footsteps sped up as they approached. Her hand reached for her holster, palming the handle of her gun. Her breath caught in her throat.

A scrawny boy rounded the corner, a mop of chocolate brown curls atop his head and falling into his eyes. Cassandra's hand immediately fell away from her gun. He stopped in his tracks as he caught sight of Cassandra, but he did not meet her eyes. Cassandra approached him slowly.

"Hello," Her voice was kind, "Do you need help?" Cassandra knelt with a smile. The boy did not respond. His hands gripped a threadbare, stuffed dog, clutching it to his chest. He rocked on the balls of his feet. She tried again, this time in French.

"Tu as besoin d'aide?" *Do you need help?*

The boy perked up, but still did not meet her eyes. He shook his head, his shoulders relaxing. Cassandra opened her mouth to ask another question. She was cut off by a loud yell that echoed down the hallway, echoing into the squad room.

"Will!" Cassandra stood up quickly, urging the little boy to hide behind her. An older man rushed in. His eyes were a wild shade of stormy blue, his hair the same shade as the boy's only longer, greyer, and slicked back under a hat. Cassandra's eyes hardened with wariness, her arms crossing over her chest. She looked over at the older man who had rushed in.

"How can I help you, sir? Are you here to report a crime?" Cassandra's tone was polite but detached. The man gave her a once over, then dismissed her with an eye roll.

"I work here, kid," Cassandra blanched, her arms falling from her chest. He just looked past her. She turned to look behind her. The boy had climbed onto the chair of the desk in front of hers. He watched her with bright blue eyes, observing her every move with a small smirk. He still held the stuffed dog in his hands, his fists clenching around it with perfect rhythm, like the beating of a heart.

"Will," The man called, but the boy did not answer. He continued to observe Cassandra with wide eyes. He tried again, an edge to his voice now, "*Guillaume* , viens-ici," The boy jumped off the chair. The stuffed dog never left his grip. The boy slipped past Cassandra and to the older man. He rested his chin on the stuffed dog's head, looking down at the ground.

"They finally sent me a new partner, huh," Cassandra looked away from the boy, finding the older man sticking out a calloused hand. "Ed Graham. This is my son, Guillaume," He gestured to the boy next to him. "Look," He sighed, tongue flicking at the toothpick that stuck out of his mouth, "He's only five, I can't leave him alone. He's here all the time, so you better get used to it,"

Cassandra nodded slowly, taking in what Ed had said. Without asking any questions, she just knelt down to greet the boy, Will, again. She held out a hand. After a few moments, Will wrapped his chubby fingers around her lithe ones.

"Bonjour," His voice was quiet, but not meek. Still, the new detective grinned.

"Je m'appelle Cassandra," *My name is Cassandra* . "Enchanté, petit." *Nice to meet you, little one.*

September 10th, 1985

"Hey, hot shot," Cassandra turned her head towards the locker room door, her curly black hair bouncing freely down her bare shoulders. Her shirt hung around her elbows, revealing the olive-toned skin of her back, contrasted by the black band of her bra. She threw her silk black blouse over her shoulders, covering up her back while she buttoned up the front.

"Lilah," She greeted the blushing detective with a kind smile. "What can I do for you?" Fully dressed now, she turned around completely. Lilah had her head poked through the door, a wolfish grin on her face.

"You've got a call on Line 2, asking specifically for you," Cassandra nodded as she kicked off her work shoes.

"Sure, I'll be right out," She pulled a dressy pair of black loafers out of her locker.

"It's Will, Cassie. He refuses to talk to anyone. He's persistent, only asking for you," Cassandra grabbed her shoes by their backs and jogged towards the door in her socks. Lilah pushed the door open, letting her through.

"Don't spoil the surprise!" Lilah called after her, but she was already at her desk, punching the button to pick up the call. Cassandra pressed the phone up to her ear. She answered warmly, keeping her voice steady. She watched one of her coworkers climbing a ladder with one half of a sign in his hands.

"Cas," A small voice crackled over the phone line, "Papa's not moving," Will whispered into the phone, choking back a sob in Cassandra's ear. At the same time, the other detective had finished hanging the sign, a banner that read, *Happy 10th Birthday Will!*

"Guillaume," She kept herself calm, her voice steady over the phone. "I'll be there in five minutes," As soon as she hung up, she immediately grabbed her coat from the back of her chair and rushed for the exit.

"Where are you going?" Lilah walked out of the locker room, dabbing her wet face with a paper towel. She had returned to her pale complexion. Cassandra yelled back over her shoulder.

"Don't worry! Just get those decorations up!" She pointed to a cardboard box on her desk. Running out to the parking lot, she shoved the key into the car door to unlock it. Popping the clutch to start the engine, she immediately pulled out of the parking lot and started the sirens, both sound, and light. She fumbled to buckle her seatbelt when she was already speeding down the main road. The siren blared and the lights flashed obnoxious shades of red and blue, but Cassandra still laid on the horn, speeding through a red light.

"Get out of the fucking road, asshole!" She hollered, tears pricking up in the inner corner of her eyes. Swallowing down her tears, she pressed her foot down on the accelerator, one hand shifting the car into a higher gear. She continued to speed down the main road for three minutes. Approaching the next light, she barely let up on the gas, just enough to press down the clutch and shift gears, making a fast turn onto a side road.

Flying down the back road, Cassandra jerked the car into a trailer park within the next minute. Unbuckling herself, she opened the car as it was still moving, putting it in park with a leg already dangling out the door. Ripping the keys out of the ignition, she jumped out of the car, fumbling with the key ring to find the right one. Climbing the stairs in only one step, she unlocked the door and pushed it open.

"Guillaume, c'est moi," *Guillaume, it's me.* She called out, peering into the house. "Guillaume!" She called again but did not hear an answer. Sobbing echoed through the tiny trailer, the sound bouncing off the tin walls. She rushed inside and shut the door behind her, following the sound of crying.

Will sat on the carpet at his father's feet, sniveling. He wiped the snot that ran down his mouth on his sleeve, only to have more run down his nose. Tears poured from his eyes, the whites of his eyes bright red in stark contrast to his bright blue irises. He wiped his face again with his sleeve, irritating the skin around his eyes that was already puffy. The phone hung off the hook, beeping its angry off-hook tone rapidly. The phone swung like a pendulum, tapping against the empty vodka bottles at the foot of the couch his father was sprawled on top. He did not move, not even a twitch.

Cassandra rushed to pick up Will off the floor, pulling him into a hug. She turned his face away from his father. He buried his face into the black silk that clothed her shoulder, his back heaving as he cried. He gripped onto the back of her shirt, shifting the soft fabric back and forth in between his fingers.

"Ton papa, est-ce qu'il respire?" *Your papa, is he breathing?* Cassandra whispered in his ear. Will did not answer. She hugged him tightly, her hand resting around the back of his head. She watched Ed Graham's still body on the couch, Will sobbing into her shoulder. She watched his father with unblinking eyes, his flannel-clad back splayed out over the couch. His legs were falling off the edge of the couch, the hems of his jeans still cuffed over his work boots.

Ed Graham's chest inflated. Cassandra sighed in relief.

"Il respire, ça va aller," *He is breathing, everything will be okay* . Cassandra rubbed circles on Will's small back. She repeated the mantra as calmly as she could, encouraging the scrawny boy to breathe until he was taking more deep breaths than shallow ones. Once his grip loosened on the fabric of her blouse, Cassandra pulled away, placing her hands gently on his shoulders.

"Attends à la porte," *Wait by the door.* Giving him an encouraging smile, she ran a hand through his hair, ruffling the curls atop his head. She wiped away a stray tear from his face with the pad of her thumb.

"Ça va aller, je te promis," *Everything will be okay, I promise you* . She whispered with a forced smile she plastered on her face.

Will sniffled, but nodded, running past her to wait by the door as she had told him. Cassandra took a deep breath and cracked her neck. She placed her hands on her back, popping the joints in her hands and her back simultaneously. She turned to look at her work partner passed out on the couch. She grabbed the two empty bottles, taking them from the floor and placing them on a cluster of envelopes atop the coffee table. She grabbed the phone and placed it back on the hook. Waiting a few seconds, she took the phone off the hook again, dialing quickly. As soon as the line was picked up, she started barking orders.

"This is Detective Poirier, get Detective Authement on the phone," A beat of silence followed.

"Cassie? What happened?" Cassandra sighed in relief as she heard the other woman's voice. She wiped away the tears that brimmed in her eyes.

"Lilah, listen to me. Eddie drank himself so stupid, Will thought he died." She watched the older man's chest rise and fall. "I'm dealing with it. I'm gonna bring Will back with me, so make sure everything is ready within the next 30 minutes, yeah?"

"Baby," Lilah's voice came through the phone as a harsh whisper, "You're gonna end up getting real hurt if you keep this up. You can't save the world, Cassie,"

"I know, Lilah, it's just," Cassandra peeked down the narrow hall where Will waited around the corner at the door. "This is Will, I've known him since he was five! I can't sit on my hands and do nothing. Not this time," She kept her voice quiet as she spoke into the phone.

"That's what you said last weekend," Lilah pointed out, her voice laced with an urgent concern.

"I know, just," Cassandra knocked her forehead into the wall, "I'll take care of it. Please get everything ready?" Lilah sighed over the speaker.

"Anything for you, baby," Cassandra smiled, grinding her heel into the carpet underneath her.

"Thank you," She hung the phone back on the hook. She pushed herself off of the wall, looking at the drunken man on the couch.

She wrapped her arms underneath Ed's back, scooping him up into her arms. She hauled him off the couch with a loud groan, her eyes squeezing shut as she strained with effort. She threw him over her shoulder, knocking her off balance. Taking a few moments to find it again with the dead weight of a full-grown, unconscious man on her, she half-dragged him into the bathroom. Without even turning on the light, she pushed aside the shower curtain and threw him into the bathtub.

She fell onto the wall, letting her head hit the green tile. She pressed her cheek into the cold porcelain as she panted. She reached into the shower and pulled on the handle, twisting it as far as it would go towards the blue marking. Water erupted from the spout. Cassandra reached down, yanking the handle on the faucet. The water stopped pouring from the spout and erupted from the shower head, dousing Ed Graham in ice cold water, clothes and all.

The drunk man jolted awake, sputtering and cursing as the water sprayed directly into his face. Cassandra rolled her eyes and opened the bathroom closet, moving toiletries around in search of something.

"The fuck!" He exclaimed, wriggling around in the tub. He slipped around the tub as he tried to get up, his limbs not cooperating. Cassandra closed the cabinet, a poorly-folded bath towel in hand.

"Don't you dare start. You don't get to be upset," She shut the bathroom door before raising her voice. "The fuck is wrong with you? You got so fucking drunk your son called me because he thought you were *dead* !" She slammed the toilet seat and cover shut, setting the towel on top of it.

"So I'm gonna take your son to the precinct. Lilah and I were planning him a birthday surprise. Yeah, that's right, he woke up thinking he found his dad dead, on his birthday. Grow the fuck up, Graham. Get your head on straight for this boy. He deserves more than this fucking mess," She gestured to him.

"Get. *Sober* ." She barked at him like it was an order.

Without another word, Cassandra left him in the tub with the shower running. Leaving the bathroom, she slammed the door shut behind her. She leaned up against it, throwing her head back. She rubbed the strain out of her eyes with the heels of her palms. Taking her hundredth deep breath of the morning, she tried to crack her knuckles again, but no popping sound came.

She pushed herself off of the door and headed down the narrow hallway towards the main door. Will waited by the door, his arms bouncing up and down against his sides. His eyes lit up when he noticed Cassandra walking toward him. She flashed a wide grin as if she hadn't just torn his father's head off.

"Ready?" She asked him in English. He nodded, turning the door handle. He walked down the steps, waiting at the bottom as Cassandra locked the door. She came down the steps and held out her hand in a silent question. Will took her hand with his smaller one, swinging their hands as they walked to the car that was parked haphazardly. She unlocked the car and held the back door open

for Will to climb in. She shut the door after him. Opening the driver side door, she got inside and turned on the engine.

"He won't die," Will spoke English quietly, the vowels relaxed in his mouth as he drawled out the words.

"No, sweetie, of course not," Cassandra reassured, but Will simply pressed his lips together, wrinkling his brows together. He brought his hands together, clasping them in his lap.

"Okay," Cassandra gave him one last smile before facing forward in her seat. She shifted the car into reverse, pulling out of the trailer park and onto the road.

"He drinks because of your job. It's because of the things you see every day." Cassandra glanced into the rearview mirror, tired eyes veiled behind a vapid cheerfulness. Will did not mumble as he did before. "Do you drink, too?"

"You don't have to worry about me, Guillaume,"

The rest of the way back to the New Orleans Police Department, they drove in silence.

Pulling into the parking lot, Cassandra parked near the front entrance. She shut off the car and got out of the car, opening the door for Will to get out. He took her hand in his and they walked to the main entrance together. Cassandra pulled the door open.

"After you," Will went in first, Cassandra following close behind. The building was quiet, the only sound was their two sets of footsteps as they jaunted down the main corridor. The lights were shut off, the building lit only by the cool morning light shining through the windows. They entered the squad room, hand-in-hand.

Will froze on the spot, a giant smile growing on Cassandra's face. He read the banner with widening blue eyes.

"Happy birthday, Will!" Lilah and her partner stood in the middle of the squad room, giant grins on their faces. With a balloon in her hand, Lilah approached the two of them while her partner grabbed matches to light the candles on a small birthday cake. With a hand on his back, Cassandra guided him forward. Lilah planted a chaste kiss on Cassandra's cheek, then leaned down.

"Can I give you a hug?" Will shook his head. "That's alright!" She chirped without offense. Unfazed, Lilah handed him the balloon she held and an envelope. "Happy birthday, Will," She gave him a wink. "Go on, open it,"

Carefully ripping the envelope open, Will found a card inside. He pulled it out gingerly and opened it. Some loose money fell out, revealing the inside of the card. It was littered with brief birthday messages and signatures from everyone in the police department. Everyone except Ed Graham.

"I think my new partner over there has something special for you," Lilah gestured to the other detective who had struck a match, lighting the candles on the cake. Thanking Lilah quietly, Will wandered over to the desk, pulling up Cassandra's chair and sitting in it as he watched Lilah's partner light the last candle.

Cassandra greeted Lilah with a proper kiss on the lips, her arms snaking around her waist in a hug. Cassandra let her head fall on Lilah's shoulder. Lilah held her close, chin resting on her shoulder.

Lilah rubbed Cassandra's back tenderly, smoothing out the fabric of her blouse.

“Ça va aller" Cassandra whispered to herself. She watched Will take a finger full of cake frosting into his mouth with glassy eyes. Lilah hummed in agreement.

September 10th, 1994

"Come on, kid." Detective Graham threw his jacket over his shoulders, grabbing his keys off of his desk. "We've got this interview to do, then we can go home." Detective Poirier jogged after him. He was already out the door. She caught up with him as they entered the parking lot, Detective Graham stopping to stretch his back.

"Damn, the Cap couldn't even give you the entire day off? It's the boy's birthday!" Detective Graham tossed the car keys at Detective Poirier, who caught them without effort.

"That is why you're driving," Brushing past her, he waltzed towards the car, and climbed into the passenger seat, leaving the younger woman standing dumbfounded outside on the curb. Shaking herself out of her stupor, Detective Poirier stepped off the curb and opened the driver's door. She was greeted by Detective Graham's gruff voice, teasing her.

"Come on now, you look like you watched your wife make out with a man," Detective Poirier let the key hang in the ignition, turning to stare at him.

"Really?" She deadpanned, fighting a smile that still ended up twitching the corner of her lips up in a one-sided grin. Detective Graham stared at her with a feigned stupor.

"Something on my face?" He twitched his upper lip, his caterpillar of a mustache wiggling around. Detective Poirier laughed, turning away from him to conceal her amusement.

"It's just, since the very first day we met, you've never let me drive your car even once." Detective Poirier adjusted her seat, pulling it forward.

"It's not my car, it's a squad car," He helped her by adjusting the right side-view mirror.

"It's your squad car," She adjusted the left side view and the rear view.

"And this'll be the last time you'll ever drive her." Detective Graham huffed, "Now start the damn car," Detective Poirier turned the key, firing up the engine. She made a left out of the parking lot onto the main road. They drove in comfortable silence. While they sat at a light, Detective Graham cleared his throat.

"It's just routine, quick in and out. The girl just lost her mother. Some kids found her in an alley outside a bar, doped up on Valium and blunt force trauma to the head. Gotta give her the updates, the comforting, you know," Detective Poirier nodded, her lips pursed together as she listened to the casual debriefing.

"Understood. I just wish you got to spend the day with your son."

"He's still down at the school and all, studyin' from dusk till dawn. I was gonna give him a visit is all,"

"Lilah and I could have handled this, is all," Detective Graham waved a hand, dismissing the idea.

"It's alright, I wanted to give my partner a shot at driving the old car," Cassandra smiled, her eyes still glued to the road. She made a left onto a back road.

"How's he liking it down there? Baton Rouge, right?"

"Full-ride to Louisiana State, he better like it down there," Detective Graham grunted, his shoulders shaking as he laughed to himself.

"Eddie," Detective Poirier glanced over at him quickly, then back to the road. She flipped on the blinker. "He can change his mind if he wants,"

"Listen, rookie--"

"Not a rookie, anymore!" She interrupted with a chuckle.

"Well, you're still a kid, *kid* ," Detective Poirier shook her head with a smile.

"Whatever you say, mon petit Chriss,"

"Now, what'd you call me?" He raised his voice playfully.

"Don't worry about it." She grabbed his arm across the console, shaking it, "A full-ride. What's not to like?" Detective Poirier pulled into the driveway. She nodded at the house.

"Alright," He clapped his hands together, "In and out, let's do this partner,"

"Copy that," Detective Poirier killed the engine and unbuckled herself. Detective Graham was already stepping out of the car.

"Keep up, kid, you're supposed to be young and spry,"

"You're just excited to see him. Admit it, you've missed him around the house. You're not used to being alone,"

"I'm not alone, I've got you,"

"Unfortunate for me," Detective Poirier quipped back, a smile on her face. Detective Graham slapped her back after she rounded the front of the car.

"Wise ass," Cassandra laughed as he grunted at her. "Let's get this done so I can hit the road." Without a word, the two walked to the front door of the house in silence. After a couple knocks at

the door, it unlocked and cracked open, a mousy teenage girl on the other side.

“NOPD,” Detective Graham flashed his badge. “Can we come in?” The girl looked behind her, biting her lip.

Detective Poirier frowned. The girl let them in. Detective Poirier entered first, her nose pinched as she looked around the living room. She looked at the teenager.

"May I ask you where the bathroom is?" The girl gestured down the hall.

"It's the third door on the left." She nodded in thanks and glanced back at her partner. He smiled at her funny, waving at her in a goofy manner.

"I'll be right back," She responded, her voice quiet. As she left, she heard the girl speak.

“I’ll get you some water,” The girl’s timid voice faded as Detective Poirier disappeared into the house, headed towards the bathroom. Glancing around and finding nobody, Detective Poirier pulled out a pair of latex gloves from her pocket, stretching them over her fingers and down her palms to her wrists. She pulled the bathroom door shut behind her and began to search.

She opened the mirror cabinet, revealing shelves full of prescription medications. They all had different names. Detective Poirier slowed her movements, careful not to knock down any bottles as she poked around. None of the patient names matched. She picked up one of the bottles that was unlike the rest as it was mostly empty, only a quarter full of circular, white pills.

Valium.

Detective Poirier looked down at the sink. The porcelain was stark white, immaculate. She crouched down, looking at the cabinet underneath the sink, but found nothing. She tried to pivot her foot on the linoleum floor to get a better look inside the cabinet. However, that’s not what she was standing on. She looked down, a plush carpet under her feet. Scrambling off of the carpet, she pulled the bathmat off the ground, revealing a floor stained dark brown. It was stained from a heavy amount of blood. She froze and crouched down on the floor.

On the other side of the door, down the hallway, the sound of glass shattering erupted in the house. Not bothering to remove her latex gloves, Detective Poirier yanked the door open, her hand reaching for her gun. Without the barrier of the door, she heard grunting and half-shouts, then a thud. A body hit the floor.

The young detective pulled her gun, rushing back to the living room. She choked on her breath, tears already overflowing from her eyes and onto her cheeks.

The cream-colored walls were splattered with bright crimson. Blood dripped off of the picture frames, the bright red now dull spots on the brown couch. The young girl stood over Ed Graham, a hammer in her hand. The head of the hammer was drenched in blood, dripping down the rusting metal and making a small pool on the floor. The girl heaved in exhaustion. She turned to look back at Detective Poirier, dropping the hammer to the floor. She raised her hands in surrender.

"I'm sorry," She began, "I just wanted everything to sto--,"

Cassandra roared, shooting her in the stomach. The girl slumped to her knees, her hand reaching to touch the hole in her body where the blood had begun to gush. She looked at the wet blood on her

fingers, glancing at Detective Graham as he bled onto the floor.

She snatched up the gun from his belt, shooting Detective Poirier. She yelled out as the bullet entered her thigh, but kept her gun raised. Detective Poirier wailed unintelligibly as she shot the girl three more times. The teenage girl fell forward, collapsing onto her stomach. Toppling over, she slammed her elbows into the ground, cursing in pain.

“Ostie! Fils de pute!” Detective Poirier screamed, holding her leg in her hand. She grunted loudly as she forced herself to crawl over to Detective Graham.

Using the last wits she had about her before the pain completely took over, Cassandra snatched her radio from her belt.

"Officer down! I need a bus now!" She rattled off the address and then dropped the radio, the pool of blood it landed in splashing. She crawled over to Ed, kneeling in the pool of his and the girl's blood that had begun to merge.

"Please, please you can't die," Cassandra took Ed into her arms, laying his head on her thighs. She looked over the wound, sobbing as she took in his skull. His curls were matted down with wet blood, fragments of bone trapped in his sticky curls. Her breathing became shallow as she cried, her hand shaking as she pushed his curls off of his forehead.

Feeling something rubbery and slimy through her gloves, she froze. The wetness was not the same as the blood. Her breathing quickened, her hand pulling the hair away from the wound slowly. She howled, her voice scratchy as she looked down at her fingers, brain matter coating the rubber.

Her entire body lurched forward, turning away as she vomited bile next to the two bodies on either side of her.

"P-please," She blubbered, bile and spit dripping down her chin. Snot ran down her face, falling into her mouth. "Please," She placed her hand on Ed Graham's chest. It was not moving. Taking into her shaking hands, she laid him flat on his back, both of them now in the pool of his blood. Standing up on her knees, she placed her hands on his chest.

Her hair fell forward, sticking to her wet face as she sobbed over him, pumping his chest at a fast pace. Her tears gushed down her face, falling onto his stained dress shirt. She began to cough, the phlegm from her screams and cries blocking her airway.

"P-please, please don't leave me," She stuttered as she sobbed through her words. She continued to pump his chest, often leaning down to open his throat and breathe into his mouth.

When the paramedics arrived, they had to pull her off of him. She was hauled off of him kicking and screaming.

Will burst into the hospital room, his darkened eyes covered in disheveled strands of hair. The nurses shouted at him through the door he had left wide open. He panted heavily, his heart rabbiting in his chest. His clean-shaven cheeks were flushed red, sweat dripping down his brow. He stood in

the doorway in slippers and sweats, a backpack slung over his shoulder. He surveyed the room, focusing on the hospital bed pushed up against the center of the wall.

Ed Graham lay in the bed. His head was wrapped up, his skin almost as pallid as the white bandages wrapped around his head. He lay flat on his back, his eyes shut, black lashes stark against his pale skin. He was bundled in thin, blue hospital blankets, his thin hospital gown peeking through from under the blankets.

He was intubated and hooked up to machines. They were all turned off.

A woman sat by his side, his limp hand clenched in her brown one, an IV stuck in the back of her hand. She was dressed in a hospital gown, her black curls hid her face from Will's sight. Her back heaved as she wept, her face buried in the blankets that covered his legs. Will did not move from where he stood in the doorway, his feet cemented to the hospital's cheap tile floor.

"Cas," Will's voice was hushed. She continued to sob into the blankets. "Cas!" He tried again, his voice breaking as he raised it. Cassandra looked up, her knotted hair flipping over her shoulders. Tears glistened down her red face, her black eyes shining in the fluorescent hospital light.

"Guillaume, I--,"

"Why is he dead?" Will began to fiddle with the strap on his cloth messenger bag. "They said," He ran a hand through his hair, pulling at it harshly, "They said he was on life support. Cas, what happened?" The more he said, Will's voice grew louder. He pulled the bag's strap away from his chest, slapping it across his chest.

"Tell me what happened!"

"He, he made me his power of attorney! And the doctors, they kept saying that--" She began to break down sobbing again, switching into French, her Quebecois accent thick as she stuttered through her thick tears. Across from her, Will stood wide-eyed, trying to make sense of what she was trying to explain. Cassandra had finally broken.

"Guillau--,"

"No," Will interrupted, jolting forward to grab her by the collar of her borrowed scrubs. "Don't you dare call me that. Your privilege to call me that died with him." He pointed at his father's corpse in the hospital bed. She sputtered, her eyes bloodshot. Will stared her deep in the eyes.

"You killed him! You pulled the plug without saying *anything* . I didn't get to tell him goodbye." Cassandra gaped at him, her jaw hanging open like it was lead. She responded to him in rapid French, her accent thick on her tongue.

"It all happened so fast! I thought… you didn't need to see him like that! Please, Guill–"

"I said stop that! It was never your job to protect me, so stop fucking trying." He pushed her by the shoulders, pointing at his dead father. "Look what happens when you do!" Cassandra sat there in shock, looking at Will with wide eyes.

“You’re not my mother, as much as you try to be, you never will. But, if you want to keep trying, she left a long time ago. So you’d better get a move on.” Cassandra sat in the chair, still holding Ed’s pallid hand. Will gawked at her, his brows furrowing.

"What are you doing?" Will threw his bag down on the floor. "Get out! I said OUT!" Will finally yelled, the vein in his forehead popping out of his forehead.

With a sniffle, Cassandra grabbed hold of her IV stand, standing up slowly, the bandages wrapped around her thigh and her knee peeking out from under the hem. Despite the tears streaming down her face, Cassandra steeled her face. While Will scowled at her, she picked up a bloodied token and stained envelope from the table. She pressed the token tight in her palm.

"This was the only other thing in his pocket. I slipped it out before his clothes were collected as evidence." She shoved the envelope into Will's chest. "You're welcome," Despite the tears that still streamed down her face, Cassandra stumbled to the door, but stopped in the doorway.

"What? Do you want me to say it in French? Will you understand it better, then?" He snapped at her, his fists clenched. Cassandra straightened her posture and turned around, sweeping past Will to stand by Ed's bedside. She brushed her fingers through the small curls that poked out of the edge of the bandages and leaned down. She pressed a kiss to his forehead.

"Adieu, mon p'tit Chriss," *Goodbye, you stupid bastard* . "Je prends la voiture," *I'm taking the car* . She chuckled into his forehead and patted his chest. Curbing her tears, she gave his cold hand one last squeeze before letting go.

“Happy birthday. I’m sorry for your loss. You’ll understand why I did what I’ve done. Someday.” She limped out the door. Will slammed the door after her. He looked down at the envelope in his hands. He ripped it open quickly, not caring to conserve the envelope. He yanked out the card inside. Opening it, a photo slipped out, falling to the ground. Will did not move to grab it, focused on his father's handwriting inside the card. He traced the shaky markings of the pen with the tips of his fingers.

Guillaume,

Happy Birthday.

You've done well, kid. I'm proud of you. Keep it up.

Dad

Tears sprung from Will's eyes, choking out a pained moan. He placed a hand on his chest as he began to hyperventilate, the smell of antiseptic burning his nose.

"I can't breathe," He gasped, dropping the card to the floor next to the picture that lay on the floor. It would come to be placed in a picture frame that sat on his bookshelf.

Will collapsed onto the bed, clutching onto the body of his father. He sobbed into the blankets until a nurse came in to tell him visiting hours were over.

The next day when Will visited the hospital, he caught sight of the daily papers. He glared at the front page headline. He snatched up a copy and left the hospital without asking which room the surviving police detective had been placed in. Getting into his car, Will drove out of New Orleans, straight back to Baton Rouge.

Detective Shot On Duty! Hero Partner Apprehends Culprit! New NOPD Lieutenant?

Laying in her hospital bed, Cassandra stared out her hospital window, watching the hustle and bustle of co-workers and bureaucrats she had never met before. The nurses turned them away, refusing to let them visit, the door to her room shut. She watched with unblinking eyes, her heart monitor beeping incessantly. She turned her head away from the window, adjusting her body to turn as much as she could with her leg elevated.

A copy of the daily newspaper littered the floor, torn up to shreds.

September 10th, 2000

Will Graham's work boots thudded on the floor, his footsteps loud as he rounded the corner of the Baton Rouge Police Department, dark purple circles around his eyes. The precinct was usually empty this early in the morning, but Will historically did not sleep much.

"Morning, Florence," He greeted the desk sergeant politely, who only responded with a nod and a quiet hum. She placed a bottle of aspirin on the counter. "Thanks," He grabbed the bottle and screwed the top off, pouring a few pills out of the bottle and knocking them back dry. He pocketed the bottle and scanned the room.

His captain's office door opened. A familiar head of black curls walked out of the room, only now with gray highlights that glimmered silver in the fluorescent overhead lights. Will unscrewed and shook the bottle, two more aspirin falling into his palm.

"If you came here to confess to murder, I'd love to arrest you but it's outside my jurisdiction. Go get your wife to arrest you." Will threw back the two extra pills.

"We split up." She was terse, her hands clasped behind her back.

"Relationships are bound to end, eventually. What'd you do, kill her parents?" Cassandra flinched but kept her composure. She straightened out the bright red jacket of her pantsuit.

"I work here, kid," Will scoffed, getting up in her face.

"Like Hell you do!" He growled. Cassandra looked him straight in the eyes, her lips pursed together, unimpressed. A balding man waltzed out of the Captain's office. He opened his mouth to yell.

"Graham! Straighten up, boy! That's no way to talk to the new Captain," Will stared at Cassandra, backing away. She just raised a brow at him, her eyes dark with exhaustion.

"Cas, what the hell did you do?"

"I'm worried, Will." She turned her head to the side, wrinkling her brow as she looked at him. "I buried your father for you. You didn't even show up to the funeral. When I went to the house, it had been sold. I haven’t heard from you in years. What else was I supposed to do?" She raised her

shoulders as she spoke, throwing her hands up like the answer was obvious. Will glanced over to his old captain, who stared him down.

"You're a high and mighty Captain, now. Put two and two together." Will stormed past her, hitting her in the shoulder with his own as he headed to his desk.

Chapter End Notes

Yikes... so that's what's up with her...you guys okay? Next chapter will be fluffy to help you recover. I hope.

If I don't see you in the comments, see you next week!

As always, thank you for the kudos, bookmarks, and overall engagement! See you next time!

The Perfect Image of Intimacy

Chapter Notes

Welcome back!

Before we get into this week's chapter, I have some important information (don't worry it's NOT a hiatus). I began writing and publishing this fic over this summer to give myself something to do while I was on break (besides work bc money is important rip). By this time next week, I will have moved back onto campus and started classes for the semester. I do not want to push the updates to every other Tuesday, but it might happen. Although I know my class schedule on paper, I am not sure how it will play out realistically.

I will keep trying to update on Tuesdays because I absolutely adore this work and I have everything planned out for it. It just might not be every Tuesday or some chapters will come late. I will check in next week when I have a better idea!

I am so thankful for each and every reader and I am so happy that you've found some amount of entertainment reading this story.

Now enough with the sappy stuff. Last chapter was a big bomb of angst. This chapter? Let's just say I had it titled in my notes as "Fluff & Smut Fest"

Final note; I thought I would give you some of the songs I used to help write this chapter. I highly recommend listening to them while reading.

Government Hooker by Lady Gaga
Hatef--k by The Bravery
For Your Love by Maneskin
Super Freaky Girl by Nicki Minaj
Below the Surface by Griffinilla
Who Is She? by I Monster

Without further ado, Chapter 10 everyone!

ENJOY, HAPPY READING!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

August 24th, 2003

"She likes you more than me." Will took a sip of his morning beer from where he lounged on the couch. Hannibal sat in the upholstered chair, making notes in the margins of Will's manuscript. Sasha had draped herself over Hannibal's foot, snoozing peacefully. She felt safe with the cannibal. A half-empty coffee mug sat beside him on the lamp table, a piece of wood, fashioned and polished round.

When Hannibal had asked him for one, Will asked what a coaster was. That night, Hannibal went out to the barn. He returned to the house with wooden coasters he had fashioned from a fallen tree branch. Yet, Will placed his beer down with nothing underneath it. Hannibal's eyebrow twitched as he watched the fat drops of condensation drip onto the wooden coffee table.

"So it seems." His tone was nonchalant, now back to marking up Will's manuscript. Still, an amused smile perked the corners of his lips, the living foot warmer's nose twitching as she snuffled in her sleep.

It had been exactly a week since Will had told Hannibal about Cassandra. The days seemed to pass by fast, the end of August approaching. They would wake up early, take care of the dogs, and work on Will's monograph. Hannibal editing and Will revising what Hannibal had looked over the day before. During the nights, they would drink and try to agree on the next victim . If Will had it his way, they would be drinking beer and heavy liquor, but when Hannibal protested on the third night of their developing routine, Will locked Hannibal in the house while he drove to the nearest liquor store to find wine. He had bought the cheapest brand he could find.

Will set his notepad down on the table beside his drink, tucking the pencil behind his ear. He bounced to his feet, sauntering to the kitchen. Hannibal glanced up from his notes, watching Will waltz off with an amused twist of the lips.

"Have you finished reviewing the notes I've left on the previous section regarding the differentiation of fungal decomposition from that of newly hatched fly larva?"

Will did not respond, opening the cabinets around the kitchen. Hannibal studied him as if he was still reviewing the manuscript, his eyes imbibing every line of Will's form. The defined muscle of his calf curving until it reached the back of his knee. The skin there was always supple and delicate. Hannibal swallowed thickly as his eyes traced the vulnerable skin behind the patella.

His crimson gaze continued up the strong contour of Will's thighs. The warm, morning light brightened the dark brown hair decorating his muscled legs, painted like the color of freshly harvested honey. The higher up his thigh his eye climbed, the hair thickened, disappearing underneath the dusty blue hem of his boxers.

He continued to browse, as if he was trying to commit every line and curve of the man to memory. His eyes lingered on the globes of Will's ass, glinting red as he watched Will's hips push into the counter as he reached for the cabinet above the stainless steel sink. Letting his eyes linger just a moment longer, his eyes followed the arch of Will's back as he stretched his good arm into the open cabinet. The frayed hem of his white t-shirt had ridden up, revealing the waistband of his boxers, slung low over his hips, revealing the small of his back. The cotton fabric stretched over his wide back, tight over his broad shoulders. The t-shirt was old, holes scattered around, but not yet threadbare.

His back popped as he stretched, letting out a soft groan. Hannibal bit the inside of his cheek. He did not move, stuck in the chair, mesmorized by the mortal god he had the very privilege to watch, his satin skin beckoning to be touched. He was snapped out of his stupor as two metal bowls clanged obnoxiously against the countertop.

Hannibal gently nudged Sasha awake, wiggling his toes under her before he stood from the chair. He finally followed Will into the kitchen, coming up behind him. He stood silently, his eyes intense on the nape of his neck. Long, brown ringlets fell loosely, draped across the tannest skin of his

body. Hannibal held his breath, his hand twitching as he raised it, like a magnet. Will pivoted, arching his back against the countertop. They stood inches from each other.

"Can I help you?" Will raised a brow, his hands holding the counter top.

"I was under the impression that you would like to publish this monograph. The man who befalls procrastination will be eaten alive by the thoughts that ruminate the brain."

"You're being dramatic,"

"Need I remind you that you are the one who has kidnapped a man,"

"You've made yourself quite at home. To work, we need to fix something to eat," Will nudged Hannibal's foot with his own, turning back to face the counter. He filled the kettle with spring water and placed it on the stove to warm while he gathered the rest of the dry ingredients from the various cabinets.

"You've proved you're worth more than soggy cereal." He grabbed a carton of eggs from the fridge and sliced open a can of evaporated milk. He moved around with ease, only stalling when Hannibal stood in his way. He brushed past his hovering each time.

"I was unaware of your culinary prowess. If I am frank, the first morning you served a meal requiring rather simple preparation,"

"Well now, darlin', I didn't know if you deserved real good Southern cookin'," Will shut off the stove and removed the kettle. He poured the warm water into the first bowl and set the kettle back on the stove, leaving the lid open.

"Am I competing under a point system, Will?" He dumped the can of evaporated milk into the second bowl. Taking a finger, he ran it under the very last contents of the stream. He turned and flicked the bit of evaporated milk at Hannibal.

"Don't get used to this, now. I only know what the average Louisiana kid should," Hannibal flinched, droplets of milk over his cheek. He lunged for Will, who held the sharp edge of the top of the can threateningly. "Go set the goddamn table before I slice up your face," He waved the piece of circular metal in Hannibal's face.

Hannibal grabbed Will's free hand by the wrist. He raised Will's hand to his face for him. Will did not fight it, his other hand still holding firm with the threat, steeling himself. Hannibal used Will's fingers to wipe the milk off of his face. He inched his hand upwards, squeezing the fingers of Will's stockier hand.

Catching Will's elusive eyes in a mutual gaze of sick admiration, Hannibal brought his fingers to his mouth, gingerly licking the droplets of milk off of his fingertips.

Hannibal placed a peck on Will's palm.

"Don't forget the yeast," His lips moved against the rough skin of Will's hand as he spoke. Will's shoulders shuddered, his teeth grit as he refused to react. Without another word, Hannibal did not let Will's hand drop, instead placing it gently back where he had found it on the counter.

He turned on his heel to do as he was told, opening a couple drawers before he found a tablecloth. Without another word, Will turned back to the counter. He ripped open the package of yeast and poured it into the bowl of water. He then added the rest of the ingredients to the bowl of evaporated milk. White sugar. Eggs. A pinch of salt. And flour.

He stood there over the two bowls, staring down at the yeast as it created a cloudy yellow mixture. He pushed the bowl away from him as if it had offended him and pulled the other close. He grabbed a fork from the drying rack in the sink and whisked the ingredients together.

After whisking, throwing in the shortening and remaining flower, he ditched the fork in favor of his hands. He threw the forming dough around the bowl until it took a general ball-like shape. Washing his hands and covering the bowl, Will shoved it in the fridge.

With a heavy breath, he shut the fridge and looked behind him. Hannibal sat perfectly at the kitchen table with a bright air to his visage, an unusually perky smile wrinkling the corners of his eyes.

"You've denied me such a pleasure?" Hannibal gestured dramatically to the fridge, where the dough would now sit in its frigid chambers to cultivate over the next few hours.

"You've made a simple task stupidly extravagant?" Will shot back, mimicking his movements as he gestured to the table. Hannibal had set the round table for two as if the Queen of England would be dining.

"You wound me, my sweet William,"

"You? Emotionally wounded? Please," Will scoffed, crossing his arms over his chest. Hannibal dropped the act.

"Touché," He admitted. Will only hummed in response, not sparing even a chortle as he walked back to the counter. He grabbed the matching set of mugs from the drying rack and set them next to the coffee pot. He filled the reservoir with water, loaded the coffee grounds, and flipped on the machine.

The coffee pot spurted to life beside Will as he hopped onto the counter, perching himself as he did at Rosaline's house as he had just over a week prior. From his new angle, he spotted a glimpse of sleek brown and glossy black fur laying at Hannibal's feet. He glanced back up. Eyes of cinnabar met eyes of sea glass.

Although they sat far away from each other, the two did not break eye contact. They mutually studied each other. Will draped over his plain, granite countertop and Hannibal poised at his seat of the table so elegantly set.

The kitchen filled with the earthy scent of coffee, the gurgling of the machine filling the silence of the house.

"You told me that I've boarded up the windows into my thoughts." Hannibal began, "Haven't you done the same? Censoring your most beautiful weapon."

"I don't have windows. I have mirrors. Reflective surfaces that line every corner of my mind." Will huffed, raising his chin.

"There must be cracks where the mirrors meet. Only very few have the ability to slither through. Do you board up those cracks?"

"I don't board up the windows. I build forts. Empathy is a one-way street. I'd like to keep it that way," Will declared like it was the end of the conversation. Hannibal did not comply.

"Is that how the Rougarou selects who to kill? Pointing the mirror at those that have let their masks slip to the public?"

"The Rougarou goes after people like you,"

"As you have so kindly established. You and I have also established that I am the exception. In turn, there is more to what the Rougarou sees in their victims. Something they have all shared, yet I have fortunately not,"

"Fortunately have not?"

"That is your duty, to tell me. You do know the Rougarou best," Will did not respond.

"To the public and the police department, the Rougarou kills those guilty of crimes set by the United States government and common society. They are incorrect. The victims are indeed guilty and some of their crimes do align with governmental and societal moral law. However, the Rougarou does not use governmental law as a line to be crossed, correct? The Rougarou is offended by crimes that *he* dictates are crimes."

"By that logic, you could be the Rougarou. You are offended by the rudeness of your victims. You not only are offended by it. The feeling goes further. You abhor the behavior. You see it as a crime. So, you kill those who are guilty of such a crime,"

"However, my Sweet William, you are obnoxiously rude. I have found you guilty of this crime, but you have not been harmed,"

"Punishment doesn't always equate physical pain. Physical pain does not equate to punishment," Hannibal smirked.

"Punishment does not always equate physical pain." He repeated, savoring the taste of the words on his mouth.

"The answers are right in front of you, Will. Yet, you refuse to consciously acknowledge them."

"I don't enjoy someone trying to break through the mirrors. I know what I am. I know who I am. I know the Rougarou,"

"As do I, but still, I must ask," Will stared at him from across the room. "Is Cassandra guilty?"

Will jumped off of the counter, something shining in his hand. Hannibal's eyes glinted red in the fluorescent kitchen light as he approached, tracking him. He did not miss a movement, not even a twitch of Will's body as he stalked towards him, his blue eyes darkened by the shadows on his face. Will pushed Hannibal's chair out from under the table with ease, turning him so they were face-to-face.

"How would the Rougarou decide? And what would Guillaume decide?" Will slashed Hannibal's face with the metal from the can.

"Don't," Will growled, his voice dropping an octave.

"Do you enjoy the sight of my blood, Guillaume? Or the taste, perhaps?" Will swung the metal again, Hannibal's skin opening before his eyes. The older man did not flinch at the pain, smiling victoriously. The coffee pot screamed its ear-piercing ring, signaling it had finished.

While they waited for the dough to chill, Hannibal and Will sat in silence with their coffee. Will had patched up what he had done to Hannibal's face. The rest of the two hours they had to wait, they worked on the monograph in silence. When it was time to remove the dough, cut and shape it, and fry it, their silence continued. Neither spoke a word. Will set the perfectly crafted beignets on the table, serving each plate. They sat down to eat, the silence had not broken. It was broken, however, once both their plates were empty, a substantial dent made in the serving platter.

Scooting the chair out from under the table, Will stood up without a word. He threw a leg over Hannibal's legs, settling himself into his lap. He brought his hand around the back of Hannibal's neck, pulling his face close to his own. Will bit the side of Hannibal's neck, planting little bites as he moved upwards until his lips met with his ear.

"You. From the beginning, I couldn't get inside your head. I didn't kill you because I was intrigued. I wanted to figure you out." Will's voice was far from timid, but still retained a silence that would inject fear like it was a poison that would thrive in his victim's organs, rotting them from the inside out.

"And have you?" Hannibal maintained his composure as he posed his dangerous inquiry. It was all rhetoric, as the two of them both knew the answer. Will bit the thin lobe of Hannibal's ear.

"If I answered that question, I'd have to kill you. I don't think I want to kill you. Not yet," He dragged his moving lips across Hannibal's cheek until they found his still ones.

"But, would you still be my angel of small deaths?" Hannibal's now moved against Will's, a ghost's breath between their lips. Will pulled him infinitely closer, kissing him like they had the first time, bloody mouths mashing together under the moon that illuminated them in a glaze of ivory blue.

Will pushed himself forward, lips open as they captured each other in a shared embrace. Hannibal brought his hands to rest low on Will's hips, where his shirt had ended and his boxers began. Hannibal pushed back, taking Will's bottom lip in between his teeth delicately. Their eyes barely open, Hannibal's gleamed in challenge, a reminder. He could bite his lip through, tearing it clean off of his face without a second thought, swallowing it raw before Will could even register the excruciating pain of being eaten alive. Will watched Hannibal through his black lashes, seeing through him with a confident defiance.

You won't.

Will took Hannibal's face in his hands, digging his short, oil-stained fingernails into his cheeks. Hannibal let go of his lip in favor of licking inside Will's mouth. He accepted, but pressed his nails deeper into Hannibal's cheeks. Underneath him, a warm hardness pressed against Will's inner thigh. His teeth grazed Hannibal's tongue, his open lips coming together into a smirk against Hannibal's red lips.

Will pulled his lips away from Hannibal's but let their foreheads rest together. Hannibal surged forward for another taste of his lips. Will grabbed him by the chin, refusing to bend to his will.

Eyelids parted completely like theater curtains, revealing show-stopping blown pupils surrounded by a ring of crimson fire.

Will simply tutted, unperturbed by the song of betrayal Hannibal's eyes sung.

"You were being so good, playing along so nicely. I was about to give you a present for your obedience. That will have to be put on hold for the moment, I reckon. Now, you'll just have to work for it, sha,"

"We have to clean up. The dogs have to go out," Will teased him, took the dogs out, and left Hannibal to deal with his feelings, both mental and physical.

August 26th, 2003

When Will awoke the next morning, the house was silent. Pushing himself out of bed, a sleep-rumpled Will staggered out of his room and into the living room. The dog beds were empty. The makeshift bed had been reverted back to a couch, the blankets expertly folded and sat atop the back cushions, the pillows propped up on the couch, fluffed evenly.

The young man with wild bed head stalked into the kitchen, ripping the door open. His eyes cast away the remnants of sleep immediately at the sight before him. Hannibal stood in the middle of the field of a backyard, having planted himself in between the house and the barn. His lean arms glistened with a thin sheen of sweat, muscles flexing as Hannibal threw a bone, a human's femur bone, to be exact. The dogs chased after it eagerly, competing with each other. His back faced the house, where Will stood just inside, both the storm door and screen door wide open.

Sweat ran down the middle of his naked spine, Will freezing at the sight. Sasha, having been victorious over the other dogs, brought the femur to Hannibal's feet, dropping it and then diving into a play bow, awaiting his next move. Hannibal bent down to grab the bone with effortless grace. His hair fell, already sweaty from the brutal humidity.

He contorted his body, winding up as he prepared to throw the bone for the dogs. From this new angle, Will's eyes caught sight of Hannibal's half-naked front. His chest hair was dark atop his shapely pecs, even with the morning sun shining upon him like a halo. The hair traveled down, not as thick around the softness of his stomach, but just as dark. As Will's gaze lowered, he found himself staring low on Hannibal's navel, the hair darker as it disappeared into his thin linen trousers. He grinned wickedly, his eyes gleaming red in the orange light of late hours of dawn.

Will's cock twitched, his morning erection tenting his otherwise loose boxers. He slammed both doors shut.

August 27th, 2003

"It would be rude of me to dine with you in this state," Hannibal stood on the porch, sweaty and shirtless, talking to a speechless Will from outside the house. The dogs sat panting, their eyes beaming with joy despite their exhaustion from their game with their new friend.

"I would like to shower, however, if you are hungry, please begin to eat without me, I implore you," Hannibal walked in, making his way to the bathroom, leaving Will at the door, still speechless and red in the face as his dogs ran inside. Minutes later, the shower had turned on, unusually loud in the rest of the house. From his seat with a plate he had barely touched, Will glanced towards the bathroom.

The door had been left ajar.

" *Will!"* A lightly accented voice cried out in bliss.

Will dropped his fork onto his plate.

That night, Will locked himself in his room. Stripping himself bare, he fell onto his bed, immediately reaching for the nightstand drawer. He rummaged around before pulling out a bottle of lube. Snapping it open, he poured a generous amount into his palm. As his hand reached to slick up his cock, his other hand brushed down his chest, eyes fluttering shut.

He caressed the skin of his chest, the pads of his fingers brushing against his nipples. He shuddered, squeezing his eyes shut, as if he was trying to conjure a better image in his mind's eye. His other hand wrapped around the base of his cock, stroking slowly with a light grip. Gradually, his pace quickened, his grip tightening. He pinched at his nipple, rubbing the erect bud in between the calloused pads of his fingers. He bit his lip as he started to moan, attempting to muffle the sounds of his pleasure.

His fingers glided slowly up the shaft of his cock, his touch light as he teased himself. He ran his thumb over the head, gasping as his legs bent at the knees, heels digging into the bed below him and his hips pushed upwards, thrusting into his palm, warm and wet. He bit back down on his bottom lip, groaning as he continued to jerk himself off, steadily applying more pressure. He ran a finger over the head of his cock again, gathering the clear fluid that had begun to weep. He flicked the tip with his wet fingers, letting his eyes fall shut as if he was conjuring a memory. His back arched, thrusting his hips up, yearning for more. His lip slipped from his teeth, his mouth agape in pleasure.

"Hannibal," His name was but a sweet breath on his lips and a bitter aftertaste on the back of his tongue. He whispered his name into the dark of the room as he fucked into his hand, as if it was a prayer that would save him from damnation.

Will gripped his thick cock back in his hand, picking up the pace as he stroked himself, grunting and cursing as he fucked the tightness of his palm. His heels slipped against the mattress as he squirmed from the ecstasy of his own touch, the sensation growing. His breathing was heavy, filling the near silence of the bedroom. On the last downstroke, he squeezed the base of his cock, as he cried out loudly at the loss of such a touch. His hips pulsed in the air, rutting against the humid air that latched onto the scent of sex. Will clasped a hand over his mouth, inhaling sharply through his nose to calm himself away from release.

Having successfully pulled himself from the ledge, Will's hand reached for the bottle of lube that lay next to his sweat covered figure. Squirting a large amount of lube into his palm, he tossed the bottle, but kept it close to him on the bed. He reached his hands down. One brushed against his still

erect cock that twitched at the touch as he tried to reach underneath him. He winced and decided to flip himself over to find a better angle.

"Hannibal," He moaned louder, his mouth stuffed with the edge of the pillow. He reached behind him. Spreading his ass cheeks, Will traced his puckered rim with his well-lubed fingers, his finger prodding at his entrance. Will groaned as it slipped in up to his second knuckle. He ground his hips into the bed, searching for the friction of the sheets against his cock, hot against his abdomen with need. He did not take his time, pressing another in quickly. He hissed but continued to rut into the mattress, his face contorted in a combination of discomfort and exhilaration.

He pressed the second finger deeper to meet the other. He began to scissor his fingers, stretching himself open.

" *Nghh,* " He bit down on the pillow as he pushed his fingers in deeper, stretching his fingers wider. He suddenly strained his neck upright, his mouth letting go of the pillow under him. He thrust into the mattress below him, grinding furiously as he came on the sheets below him.

" *Hannibal!"* He screamed out, lost in his blessed rapture. He rolled on his back, laying on his hand that was still inside of him. He threw his head back onto the pillow wet with his sweat and spit, still indented from his teeth. He let his eyes flutter shut, his chest painted in strokes of semen, white and glistening like it was mother pearl, glinting in the few moonbeams that cast themselves through the broken window blinds.

Exhausted, he was soon engulfed in the shadows cast by sleep, taken into the realm of hazy dreams. He was not conscious long enough to hear the floorboards that creaked outside his bedroom door, groaning under the pressure of footsteps.

August 28th, 2003

"Did you have a nice evening, Will?" Hannibal was already sitting in the upholstered chair, the manuscript open on his lap. Will did not respond. He stalked over to Hannibal, catching his gaze in his own dark one. He snatched the papers off of Hannibal's leg, and threw them to the floor. They scattered, drifting in the air around them as they fell. The house filled with the sound of rustling pages and heavy breathing.

Will shoved Hannibal's leg off of the other where it was perched. He climbed on top of him, straddling him. His hips sat tilted forward, the raised tent in his pants pressed flush against Hannibal's crotch. Will grabbed Hannibal's face with both hands, pulling their faces together. He pressed his scowling lips to Hannibal's victorious smile.

"You are sickening, like a fuckin' cancer that has burrowed its way into my spine,"

"How very romantic of you," Hannibal caressed Will's face with the back of his fingers, stroking his cheek gently. Will attacked Hannibal again, the older man's back slamming into the back cushion, the chair rocking onto its back legs for a moment, the front legs falling back down to the floor with a heavy thunk.

Hannibal wrapped a large hand around Will's neck, his thick palm pressed against the flesh of his neck, his fingers pressing into his trachea. The rings of cartilage fit into every dip and curve of Hannibal's fingers, molding into Will's skin as if they were trying to merge into one another.

"You enjoy this, don't you? Does this turn you on?" Hannibal's squeezed. Will gagged, lifting his chin high as he tried to breathe, tendons straining against Hannibal's hand. "What a naughty boy you've been. Trying to tease me," Will continued to bare more of his neck to Hannibal, straining upwards. He pressed his legs down, squeezing on either side of Hannibal's thighs. He dug his knees into the muscle of Hannibal's thigh, where the meat dented on either side. Hannibal's hand tightened in response to the discomfort.

"You did it to me. You were never the innocent one." Will struggled through grit teeth he bared at Hannibal. He smirked, the sadist's eyes glinting with something inhumane. "Stop acting like it," He began to slur his speech. Hannibal let go of Will's throat, letting his body relax. Will doubled over, his forehead hitting Hannibal's shoulder as he coughed, desperate for the rush of oxygen reaching his lungs.

"You enjoyed it, did you not?" Will continued to hack into Hannibal's shoulder, refusing to answer. Hannibal nudged the top of Will's head with his cheek, the soft curls brushing his cheek. Hannibal's nostrils flared as he inhaled deeply, pressing his nose into Will's mess of hair. Hannibal buried his face into the curls surrounding himself in the musky scent of Will Graham, falling into his essence.

His hands traveled down Will's heaving back, sliding over his ass and grabbing him by the tops of his thighs. Will wrapped his arms around Hannibal's neck as Hannibal began to shift their shared weight. He stood, lifting Will up with him. Having caught his breath, Will clutched at the back of Hannibal's head, running his fingers through the straight hair. Grabbing a handful, Will yanked Hannibal's head to the side to face him, his temple resting on Hannibal's shoulder.

They stood there, one carrying the other. Will with his temple resting against Hannibal's shoulder and Hannibal with his head Will had forced to turn while they stared at each other with rivaling eyes deep in silent conversation.

"I could snap your neck," Will whispered sweetly, his fingers pulling at the strands of Hannibal's dark hair, pulling to demonstrate how close he was to ending Hannibal's life in that moment.

"I could very well drop you, letting your head bash into the floor. It is astounding how much injuries to the head bleed," Hannibal pointed out, loosening his grip on Will's thighs. Will's one arm secured around Hannibal's shoulders, pulling himself up so his lips were level with Hannibal's ear.

"Charming. But, the only place you're dropping me onto is the bed, sha,"

Hannibal brought them through the door and into the bedroom, Will kissing and biting up the sides of his pale neck, pulling at his hair. Hannibal swiftly threw Will down onto an unmade mess of a bed, his hand untangling from his hair. Will hit the mattress with a soft groan, his body bouncing with the springs of the bed. Hannibal stared down at him, eyes burning bright under the rays of morning sun seeping into the room. Will looked up at him with half-lidded eyes, throwing a hand behind his head, the other reaching down to his boxers that had begun to tent. He slipped his thumb underneath the waist band.

Hannibal marveled at the sight before him, inhaling the humid air of the room deep into his lungs. He parted his lips, letting the taste of the air coat his tongue.

"You must have been a sight to behold. Your screams of ecstasy rival the brilliance of the world's most masterful operas," Hannibal pulled the borrowed shirt over his head, revealing his softly sculpted chest and abdomen.

"The air still preserves your scent. You've intoxicated me from the very first taste." Hannibal stripped off his slacks. Will pulled down his boxers, flinging them across the room. He grabbed the bottle of lube from under his pillow. Hannibal leaned forward, hands falling to grip the soft fabric of the mattress, bunched up on either side of Will's head. Hannibal leaned over Will, climbing up onto the bed.

"You're the devil. You knew what you were doing. Playing with the dogs shirtless, jacking off with the door open." Will ran a hand through the bangs that hung down from Hannibal's hairline. He cupped the back of his neck, wrapping his leg around Hannibal's bent knee.

"Punishment doesn't equate physical pain. You were punishing me for teasing you. So you teased me back," Will frowned, looking up at the sadist before him.

"It worked, did it not?" Hannibal grinned wolfishly, revealing his sharp canines.

"I don't know, Doctor Lecter. Wouldn't it only work if you completely gave me what I refused to give you?"

"I believe you are correct," With the last word out of his grinning mouth, Will pulled Hannibal down to meet in another kiss. Hannibal grabbed Will's wrist and pinned it down against the bed. Relinquishing Will's mouth from his hold, Hannibal ravished him.

Hannibal kissed and bit and sucked at Will's neck, moving down to his chest, leaving small hickeys all the way down. Will squirmed under his touch, pushing his wrists deeper into the bed and his body up to meet Hannibal's lips and teeth with urgency. Arriving at his chest, Hannibal flicked a pink nipple with the very tip of his tongue. Will moaned loudly from under him, his leg pulling at Hannibal's from where he had intertwined them.

Hannibal took it into his mouth, first giving it a few experimental licks and sucks. Will cried out, his wrist flexing as he formed a fist, pushing against his human restraints. With a deep chuckle, Hannibal nipped at Will's nipple, pulling at it. He smiled as Will's cries grew louder and his resistance against him increased. The hand tangled in his hair pulled him away. Letting the bud go, Hannibal complied and found himself at Will's navel.

He pressed his nose into the thick trail of hair on the lowest part of his abdomen, inhaling the musky scent deeply. Will twisted his body underneath Hannibal's, his erection bobbing, caressing Hannibal's cheek.

"I want you to make me scream," Will commanded, his voice firm, but breathy. "Make use of that pretty tongue of yours," Hannibal glanced up, finding Will staring at him with eyes darker than the night.

"The first person to equate pitch darkness with the night must have been blinded by light pollution." Hannibal stared into Will's expectant eyes. "They should have compared the darkness to the ocean. Much darker than the night sky. The color blue has an impeccable range," The edge in Will's eyes softened at the words. Taking the moment he had created, Hannibal slipped through the cracks of the mirrors, catching Will off-guard as he grabbed him by the ankles and pushed his legs

upwards, his bare ass in Hannibal's face. Taking his hands away from his ankles, Hannibal spread Will open, licking at his entrance.

Will cried out as Hannibal plunged his tongue into his hole, still wet and stretched from the night. Hannibal rested his nose against Will's perineum, taking his own pleasure as both the smell and taste of Will's core entered his very being. Atoms that made up Will's existence met the atoms that made up his own existence, the atoms intertwining together inside of both of them as Hannibal consumed him.

Choked sobs and shattered breaths filled the room that smelled of heat and sweat. As Hannibal sucked and licked into Will's entrance sloppily, the younger man parted his legs wider, locking Hannibal in place with his legs as he wrapped them around his neck. He reached both hands down, the bottle of lube forgotten at his side, in favor of touching Hannibal's hair. He pushed his face further into him, Hannibal burying two fingers into Will's spit-slicked hole, hushing him as he writhed, his cock straining with need, precum slicking his stomach. He bucked his hips into Hannibal's waiting hand, lithe fingers working deeper into him than he could have on himself the night before.

"Please," Will panted and wailed in between his words, pleading incoherently. "Hanni-- *Fuck!"* Will screamed like fire was engulfing every atom of his being, every molecule screaming in rhapsody as Hannibal's fingers brushed against a certain bundle of nerves deep inside of him.

"A prostate orgasm can be reached from two locations, my Sweet William," Hannibal spoke rather calmly, however, there was a breathlessness to the sound. He licked his lips. "The first from direct, internal stimulation, as such," Hannibal pressed against the bundle again, causing Will to sputter as he cried out again. He continued to massage his prostate. "The second, from external stimulation," With one hand still inside Will, Hannibal moved his other to the fragile skin of Will's perineum, applying a light amount of pressure, watching Will's reactions intently. His entire body was in tremors, his legs trembling around Hannibal's shoulders.

Hannibal began to massage the delicate patch of skin, his other hand mirroring the movement inside. Will's breath hitched interrupting his soft moans and mewls that had become near constant.

"Achieving orgasm by external massage is often called a perineum orgasm. However," Hannibal placed a ginger kiss on the inside of Will's thigh. "Many find this combination of both internal and external stimulation to provide the greatest sensation of pleasure."

Will's eyes brimmed with tears, some having already fallen down his cheeks. Will's bare skin was littered with goosebumps despite the thick heat of the room. He had bitten through his bottom lip, blood dripping down the corner of his pinked lips, small bruises trailing from his flushed neck to his chest and around his puffy nipples, all the way down to his navel, soaked in sweat and precum. His fingers had found the back of Hannibal's neck, his blood coating the undersides of his nails.

Will began to whine as Hannibal massaged his prostate from two places. His whines soon escalated to sobbing, his throat croaking as he tried to scream. Will's stomach began to clench, abs convulsing as the last thought in his mind was plucked away by an unmistakable euphoria. Will's hips pumped erratically, clear ejaculate streaming from his cock onto his stomach.

" *Fuck, f-fuck! Hannibal! F-fuuuck!"* Will howled in the early morning light, his blood rushing through his body as he came undone under Hannibal's masterful touch, engulfing his body into an infinite pool of velvet, every pore of his body concealed from the stone cell of the world that cuts and scrapes without mercy.

Will's head fell limp against the mattress, his eyes falling shut. Before he fell into he and Hannibal's shared darkness, a warm body lay next to him. The soft breath of a whisper tickled the inside of his ear.

"My emotions betray me, my Sweet William. I am your captive. You've gripped me tight and still have not let me go. This is not what I fear. I do not wish for you to let me go. This is what I fear. You will be my death. And I will forge the knife with which you kill me. I would see this as the highest honor, only second to a death by your beautiful hands. The perfect image of intimacy."

Chapter End Notes

WHEW!

As always, let me know what you think! I love reading your comments, they leave me in hysterics.

We also hit 10,000 hits! Thank you all so much!

Until next time!

It Was Bound To Happen

Chapter Notes

Hello! Before we get into the chapter, I have some announcements!

My good online friend, The_Grey_Lady_Weeps, made beautiful fanart for this fic! The fanart is posted in Chapter 6, referencing one of my favorite moments of this work! So, go back and enjoy the art! And make sure to check out The_Grey_Lady_Weeps here on AO3! Her writing is incredible! She is currently working on a Criminal Minds fanfic, which is so good that I read it even though I'm not in the fandom!

Second, a wonderful guest user here on AO3, by the name OSHI, has begun to translate this work into Russian! How cool is that! The link to the translation is in the summary! Check it out!

As you are aware, September 10th has become a big motif in this work. September 10th is also upon us in real life. I've been planning a special little something... keep an eye out for that...

Lastly, I would like to address the upload schedule. I will be honest, this semester I'm taking 20 credits in undergrad. I would love to keep my uploads as consistent as they have been, but I hope you understand that I'll need flexibility. I'm sure as the semester continues that I will become more accustomed to my schedule and adapt, meaning better time management.

I want to aim to continue the updates on Tuesdays. Just be aware that an upload here or there will be skipped. I really hope you all understand and I'm so grateful for the support and love this story has received!

Alright, you've waited long enough for this next chapter. Without further ado, happy reading!

TW for emetophobia, (mention of) suicide

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There is something about the leaves shining in the sunlight, dripping with the water of a late afternoon rain.

During a sunshower, the trees sparkle like diamonds in direct sunlight, dancing to the pattering tune as they shimmer brightly. Drops of water shine like stars that sparkle in the pitch dark of a desolate land. The fall, dripping from the leaves and flower petals alike, falling to the ground like shooting stars falling out of the sky. The light drizzle turns into a heavy rain, but the sun still shines bright in the sky. Unlike a thunderstorm, a sunshower is peaceful, breathing new life into the world whilst shrouding the bayou in the sun's warm smile. Beauty begot from nothing, rather than from destruction. This is not a renaissance, but pure creation.

The raindrops cling to the window as they fall. The steps of their gentle dancing putter against the glass. Beyond the clear barrier, two bodies lay together, limbs tangled and skin pressed against skin, like their physical beings yearned to merge. Brown curls pressed in between two pale

shoulder blades, bare chest flush against the other. An arm was thrown over a slim waist, met with the other man's arm. Their arms were twisted together, their fingers interlocked in sleep. The brown haired man's arm disappeared underneath the dirty blonde's torso. Their legs were threaded together, closer in color from months of being hidden from the sun, tucked away into jeans and dress pants, respectively.

As the raindrops continued their tap dance against the window, the two began to stir, untanned legs running up against the other. Skin, soft with vitality, sliding against skin, peeled away to reveal the nonhuman creature underneath. Chests began to expand further as they roused from the unconscious world of sleep. The two awoke together, the brown haired man placing his chin on the other's shoulder. Releasing the dirty blonde's waist, his arm glided upwards, tracing every bit of naked skin with the ghost of a touch. Nails gently scraped his skin, fingers finding their way to two slits in the skin that stretched tightly around the dirty blonde's cheekbone. Although Hannibal did not flinch at the touch, Will's eyes became shaded. He scrunched his brow.

"It was bound to happen." It was as if Hannibal was speaking about the weather. Will adjusted, pressing his forehead into Hannibal's naked shoulder. Even with a thin sheen of sweat from their earlier activities, Hannibal still smelled clean, but the undertones were sharp, like basil or spearmint.

Will buried his nose into the base of Hannibal's neck and inhaled deeply. He mumbled something into Hannibal's skin, his breath hot on his dampened skin.

"I cannot understand you, my Sweet William," Hannibal's eyes looked behind him, vision obscured by the wild tangle of Will's brown curls. Will took another inhale of his choice aroma before removing his nose from the source. He traced a calloused finger over the rough texture of the scab.

"I said you deserved it," Will crooned, his drawl thick from the intoxication of sex-induced pleasure and sleep. The corner of Hannibal's lips curled up in a smirk. He reached a hand back to stroke Will's hair.

"After you explained your relationship with your boss, I found it prudent to probe the subject. I was curious as to how you would react. Your reaction was not unexpected. However, it was executed in a manner that was unexpected," Hannibal's smirk grew into a grin, spreading over his face like a cluster of vines. "An incomparable technique,"

Will pressed into the wounds, digging his nails into the fresh scabs. Hannibal refused to wince. Will did not see, however, when his eyebrow twitched.

"I'm not a lab rat, Doc. This is supposed to be a partnership. We've a deal,"

"A tentative one. You were the one to declare so adamantly that trust is a fickle thing."

Will was silent, breaking their familiar pattern of tongue-in-cheek conversation. The silence sat in the air, heavy like the humidity of a late Louisiana summer. Will craned his neck forward, placing lips dry from sleep upon Hannibal's cheek, prickly with newly grown stubble.

"Not when someone trusts themself. And when I turn the mirrors to you, I see him."

"Who do you see?"

Will rolled away abruptly, their bare skin peeled apart, sticky from sweat and humidity. Will sat up, his feet hitting the ground. He threw his face into his hands, covering his eyes he was squeezing shut. Hannibal turned to face Will, watching as he hunched into himself. Hannibal's eyes traced the faintest outlines of vertebrae, starting from the small of his back and working his way up to his wide shoulders.

A bullet wound marred his skin, breaking the symmetry of his tanned shoulders. Hannibal devoured the sight, his fingers twitching upon the mattress as his eyes burned. He swallowed deeply, devouring foreign feelings and banishing them into the belly of the beast. Where they would stay. Hopefully.

"When the mirrors of your mind face me, Will, who do you see? Who is looking back at you?" He probed, the sheets rustling as he inched closer.

"Cassandra knows it's not just the Rougarou. I need to go in, see how much she knows," Will began to bounce his leg, shaking his head. Hannibal moved closer, placing his steady, warm hands on Will's shoulders. He avoided the bullet wound. Will's muscles initially twitched, but then relaxed. He began to lean into Hannibal's touch, almost pressing his bare skin back against Hannibal's. His otherwise unmarred skin began to meet the dark hair over Hannibal's chest that tickled Will's back as they began to touch. As if their bodies wanted to merge into one another.

"When you look at me, Will, do you see the Rougarou? Or do you see yourself in me?"

Before Hannibal had even finished the last word of his question, Will had swept himself off of the bed, snatching his boxers off of the floor as he walked out the door, still nude from the morning. Hannibal fell back onto the bed, leaning on his elbow. He lounged as he watched Will walk away, his smirk falling to a frown. Reluctantly looking away from Will's bare ass as he walked away, Hannibal looked down at the empty sheets beside him, still warm with Will's essence. They smelled of sweat and sex, a whiff of smoke barely there.

The game of half-truths and emotional probing had always been a grand source of enjoyment. Still, Hannibal continued to frown, his lips coming together in a pout.

"There are two serial killers active in the Baton Rouge area," Cassandra paced the length of her office, in one hand a paper cup of coffee, and in the other, the voice recorder she spoke into. The display board of the Rougarou's victims over the past 5 months had been moved from the conference room, now posted on the wall of her office opposite the wall with her coffee pot and a framed picture of a young boy, Will Graham, and his father. The Rougarou victims were separated from the photo of the man in the tub. Above the dead man's photo was the name.

The Ripper (Mostro di Firenze)

Cassandra crushed the coffee cup in her hand, blinking slowly with exhaustion. She threw the coffee cup into the trash can beside her desk. Four other crushed cups sat on top of each other in the garbage.

"The Rougarou has a recognizable pattern and leaves no traceable evidence. All the victims were found floating deep in the bayou, but dates of death have determined that these people were killed at varying times. The first that was found, Parker Hayes, was determined to have been killed 48 hours before he was found. No more than that. However, the second was found in a state of decay that determined her death was three weeks before she was found. The first two were found miles from where they had been last seen. The first, only 28 miles, but the second was last seen 93 miles away from where her body turned up."

Cassandra paused the recorder. She thought for a moment as she poured herself another cup of coffee, filling her cup with the last of the pot. Filling the pot with another full pot of water and grounds, she switched it on. She rubbed at her eyes, bruised with exhaustion. She took another sip of her black coffee, letting the caffeine rush into her system. A sip turned into another and another until she had drunk half the cup. She flipped the recorder back on, bloodshot eyes staring at the board.

"The monster, or the Ripper as I've decided to call him, seems to have an appreciation for the fine arts. For the drama. Based on the dates, he's been at this longer than the Rougarou." She did not glance at the Rougarou's drawn up profile. She didn't need to. "Based on the estimation of the Rougarou's age, we can say that the Ripper is on the older end of middle age. Maybe forties to fifties, white male, but not American. His murders started in Florence. Based on the…" Another thoughtful pause, "artistic element, possibly a college professor or an art historian."

"Documented murders, at least. The Ripper doesn't just destroy like the Rougarou, he is trying to make a statement. Something with this amount of flair is someone who is well-educated and superfluous. He wants to perform. The Rougarou only ever wanted to destroy, a cleansing of some sort? A vigilante murderer. The Ripper just uses his victims like his own personal canvas."

Her realization came to fruition as she spoke it into existence, her eyes drifted over the papers on her desk.

"Will would have seen this. Why is he lying?" The smell of fresh coffee and the ceasing of a gurgling pot drew her attention. Her eyes drifted from the coffee pot to the young boy's face in the picture, his smile shy but his eyes bright. Cassandra's tired face softened.

"Or maybe he didn't see it because he is still recovering. I shouldn't have asked him to come in," She shut off the voice recorder and threw it on her desk atop the piles of endless papers and thick folders. She stared at the warm welcome of a pile. She leaned forward onto the desk, crossed her arms on top of it, and plopped her head down in the cradle of her arms. Sleep consumed her.

Will stood in front of the closet mirror, buttoning the last few buttons of his plaid shirt. His eyes flickered from his face to the bed behind him. Hannibal sat in the bed, propped up with all the pillows. Sasha the three-legged doberman was sprawled over his lap, which was thinly draped in a single bedsheet. Will's eyes softened as Sasha nuzzled her head into Hannibal's leg, throwing her single front paw over her face, rubbing the sleep out of her eye she could reach. Hannibal was careful not to move the lower half of his body. The upper half, however, was preoccupied. Will glanced him over, tracing over his bare chest to find a portion of the manuscript in his hands. Will's eyes drifted over. The leather journal sat on the nightstand.

"You want to work on the manuscript more than play Rougarou?" Will left the couple top buttons open, pulling the shirt down in the front so it wouldn't choke him. Hannibal glanced up, meeting the reflection of Will's eyes. He twirled the pen around in his fingers.

"You had just said you wished to return to work at an earlier date because dear Cassandra has prophesied the truth," Will rolled his eyes, snatching up a clean towel from the pile of neatly folded ones on the spare chair and throwing it at Hannibal. When he caught it with one hand, Will let out a huff of air.

"Prophesied? What are we talking about Kassandra of Troy or Cassandra of Louisiana?" Will wandered over to his dresser, opening it to grab a pair of pants.

"Might I suggest hanging your pants in the closet? After they are ironed, they will not wrinkle as much as they do when they are folded and stuffed into a drawer." Hannibal looked down at the papers again, making a correction with the tiniest flick of the pen.

"I don't own an iron," The pen hit the carpeted floor with a soft thud.

"William."

"Hannibal." The man in question frowned. With the grace of a dancer, Hannibal swept himself up off the bed and onto his feet. The sheet fell away from his waist, revealing his naked form. Still, he stood in all his nude glory, unbothered. Sasha perked up, her ears peaked as Will let out a sharp whistle.

"This your attempt to get me back into bed? Not content from our morning full of fucking?" Will grabbed one of the only two ties from his closet. He considered it for a moment, but ultimately hung it back on the rack.

"Proper upkeep of one's wardrobe includes the routine ironing of one's clothes,"

"Housewife was right," Will huffed under his breath. He knelt down in the closet and pushed some clothes out of the way, revealing a tiny door in the wall. He grabbed the shoehorn that had been stuffed into one of his shoes.

"But hey," Will grunted as he pried the door open, revealing a safe inside. He twisted the dial. With the correct code, the door clicked open. "If you want me to iron my clothes so badly, go get one yourself," A jingle of keys filled the silence of the room. Will stood, his back still to Hannibal.

"I should have given you these back after Rosaline." Fully dressed for work, Will turned to face Hannibal who was still completely nude. "I didn't think you'd play by the rules of my lil' game,"

"It would be rude to do so," Hannibal answered without missing a beat. He swallowed a lump in his throat. Will looked Hannibal in the eyes and smiled wide, a touch of laughter on his tongue.

"I trust you, Hannibal. It's not some fickle thing, because I trust you like I trust myself," Will stepped forward, taking Hannibal's hand in his own. He placed the keys in his palm and wrapped his fingers around them, holding his closed fist in his two hands. Will leaned upwards, placing a chase, but soft kiss on Hannibal's lips.

"I have to leave now, if we're gonna get the prophet off the wolf's tail," Without another word, Will turned on his heel and walked out of the bedroom and then out the front door, walking into the

bright, post-rain sunlight of the early afternoon. The door shut behind him, leaving Hannibal in the bedroom with his keys in his hand and a bitter scent of sex and untold betrayal lingering in the humidity of the air.

The office phone blared loudly as it rang, jolting Cassandra from her deep slumber. She lifted herself up off of her pillow of papers, pushing some accidentally off of the table. The recently created Ripper file fell to the floor, pictures of the murders attributed to Il Mostro falling halfway underneath the desk.

She reached for the phone, pushing aside the sea of papers she had scattered across her desk. Cassandra's lips parted as she let out a long but silent yawn. She picked up the phone, answering the line. She greeted the caller through the end of her yawn. Her other hand found the token she kept in her desk drawer.

"You found something?" Cassandra pressed the coin into the palm of her hand. She looked out the window of her office, watching the officers go about their day, filing papers, bringing in people in cuffs, coming and going out of the locker room for a small dose of sleep on the lumpy cots. She stalled as she caught a glimpse of a head of shaggy brown curls sitting at the desk that had been empty for the past month.

As the person on the other line spoke into her ear, Cassandra's eyes widened. Ed Graham's sobriety chip fell out of her hand, hitting the floor and rolling under the desk as she raced to grab a pen.

"Okay, I'll be right there right away. You said it was the--" She scribbled down the name and address, "--The Chateau Phoebe? Got it. Thank you, I'll see you in about an hour, tops." Cassandra slammed the phone back on the receiver, blinking away the last of the sleep from her eyes. She grabbed the keys to the squad car and rushed out of her office, into the bullpen, headed straight to one Will Graham, who sat at his desk, staring at the computer screen in front of him.

Cassandra scrunched her brow as she watched him begin to slump in his chair. As she approached, she caught a glimpse of the screen, recognizing the interface of the state's database for police reports. Walking behind his desk, Cassandra frowned as she made out the name on the report.

"Her death was ruled a suicide. Sad isn't it? Just after her husband died days before he was supposed to be released." Will stilled as Cassandra spoke from behind him. He started to turn in his chair when she stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. She walked around to the front of his desk. When her eyes found his, melancholy shadowed them, still staring at the screen. Will did not respond.

"The dog is still missing," She tried, only to be met with silence once again. She restrained herself from sighing.

"I'm on my way to a scene. The New Orleans captain called and she's letting me come take a look. Could be a lead on the Rougarou. Let's hope this time the bastard got sloppy. Lord knows we need to catch a break."

No response.

"I wasn't expecting you to come into work a few days early. I hope that means you are feeling better." She did not mention his father. "You can come with me to the crime scene. It's at the Chateau Phoebe," Finally, Will's eyes darted away from the screen. Cassandra faltered as he looked at her, his eyes shattered mirrors.

"No, I...," His voice was quiet and raspy. "I have another lead. I'm going to go." He stood up out of the chair, grabbing his keys and phone. "I have to go look," He rushed out of the precinct. Cassandra stood there in front of the desk, once again empty. She took a breath and turned to follow out the door. As she exited the building, she saw Will's red truck already pulling onto the road and speeding the opposite direction, towards where he lived in Henderson.

As Cassandra approached the squad car, she let out a heavy sigh. Climbing inside, she placed her fists on the steering wheel, looking over at the empty passenger seat.

"I haven't been taking good enough care of him, Eddie. I'm sorry." Cassandra hit her fist on the steering wheel. "I'm sorry!" She hit it harder. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" She screamed, slamming her fists on the wheel while tears brimmed in her eyes. She breathed shakily as she let out a couple sobs, letting her head fall forward onto the wheel.

"I'm so, so sorry," She sniffled, her knuckles white as she clutched the wheel. Composing herself enough to sit up, she furiously wiped the tears from her eyes with the heels of her hands. Taking a breath, she turned on the car and pulled out of the parking space. By the time she pulled out of the lot only a couple minutes, it was like she hadn't screamed and cried at all. The only evidence was the puffiness of her eyes.

"Lilah," Cassandra shook her ex-wife's hand outside the motel building. They stood in front of the police tape that roped off the building from curious citizens, but mostly to ward off the ravenous journalists looking for the next big scoop to crucify the police. Red and blue lights liberated the setting sun from its job of illuminating the sky as dusk set in, the star retiring for the night. The forensics team swarmed the building, running in and out and from room to room, like ants in a colony. Cassandra looked over Lilah's shoulder, finding the bulk of workers buzzing around one specific room.

"Thank you for calling me," Cassandra smiled grimly. If she noticed the residual puffiness around her eyes, Lilah did not mention it. Instead, Lilah pulled Cassandra into a bone-crushing hug. When she pulled away, Cassandra truly took in Lilah's face, her familiar brown skin illuminated by the police lights. Her aquiline nose wrinkled in the corners from her genuine smile. They let go of each other, pulling away from each other's embrace.

"It's good to see you." Lilah's voice was characteristically warm, her embrace always one of pure comfort. Her deep brown eyes gazed into Cassandra's own, the lights making the whites of her eyes appear red and blue as they flashed. Cassandra felt herself take deeper breaths, a peaceful feeling washing over her. Lilah's presence and touch had always had that effect on her. Cassandra nodded in a tacit agreement. She cleared her throat.

"What do we know already?" Cassandra gestured to the scene behind them. Lilah looked over her shoulder, pointing to the busiest room.

"Based on the decay, it's been maybe a couple weeks." Lilah watched her officers do their jobs, cameras flashing as they documented the scene.

"A couple of weeks? How come it's taken so long to find?"

"This isn't a very populated area. This place historically doesn't get much tourist traffic," Lilah took a pause, looking back to Cassandra. "It's bad in there, Cassie. There was a dinner table set up in the suite, three place settings. No bodies."

"The Rougarou kidnapped a new victim? The next full moon is September 10th, we're just about a week away." Cassandra crossed her arms over her chest, taking a step forward to stand next to Lilah, their backs facing the rest of the parking lot.

"No, the man who works the front desk is still missing. What we found was a severed leg. Based on what's left, I think it's the leg of your second victim from this past full moon."

"What's left? We can put a rush on the DNA, but can't you take a blood test? It would give us a better idea." Lilah looked down at the pavement, Cassandra looked over at her, raising a brow.

"We can't do a blood test," Lilah's voice was quiet, but firm.

"Then call for someone to bring a blood kit," Cassandra reached for her phone in her pocket.

"No Cassie, we can't." Lilah placed her hand on Cassandra's wrist, stopping her from making a call. She guided her to the entrance of the suite. Lilah and Cassandra flashed their badges to the officers before ducking under the tape to enter the crime scene. A foul smell enveloped Cassandra's senses, invading her nose and causing it to wrinkle. Cassandra began to sneeze, but bit her tongue to stop it from coming.

"Well then why not?" Cassandra took a breath through her mouth, gagging as the vileness of the air langed on her tongue instead.

"The leg was cooked,"

Cassandra stopped short, eyes drawn to the cluster of detectives, forensic scientists, and officers huddled around the center of the room. When one of them walked away with a sample zipped up in an evidence bag, Cassandra caught a glimpse of the dining room table. A NOPD officer came out of the kitchen, handing Lilah a clipboard, not staying a moment to stay by her side, but going to continue working the crime scene.

Plates sat in three different place settings like Lilah had said. Two plates were empty, but dirty like they had been eaten off of. The third was full of rotting meat. In the center platter, sat a large hunk of meat. A roast still on the bone. The meat had begun to decay, sliding off of the plate. Flies scoured the table, clusters of maggots squirming across the wet, rotting meat. The serving platter was clear crystal, reddish brown liquid pooling underneath the squishy slab of leg.

Bile burned the back of her throat, but she approached, catching sight of a pattern decorating the edge of the serving platter.

"Another serving platter has been cataloged as missing." Lilah spoke up, looking over the papers on the clipboard. Cassandra grabbed latex gloves from her pocket, fitting her hands into them as she took the empty place at the table, shoulder to shoulder with other detectives and scientists who were documenting the scene in great detail. Cassandra reached to touch the edge of the platter.

"From the same matching set as that one with the cooked leg. There are distinct diamond shapes cut into the edge of the crystal," Cassandra held her breath, running her gloved finger over the shapes, familiar to her fingertips. Cassandra's eyes widened, still with shock. Lilah continued.

"Specifically, a dessert platter is missing. Same diamond pattern around the edge." Cassandra pulled her hand away as if the crystal had burned her. She turned around, her complexion painted a hue of green. Her mouth opened as she took a breath, her stomach twisting like someone had plunged their hand inside of her and took her stomach in their hands, clamping down on it with an iron grip.

“Pudding,” Cassandra began to choke and ran out of the building. She peeled the gloves off of her hands like they were melting her skin, throwing them onto the pavement. She ran around the edge of the motel and heaved at the first site of bushes.

Bile and coffee emptied out of her, burning her throat as she threw up, one hand on the wall to brace herself.. Tears dripped off of her eyelashes, falling into the bushes with her vomit. She spit out the vile saliva mixed with acid that burned her mouth, spit dripping from her bottom lip. Cassandra continued to cough the burning sensation away, spitting up anything that came out.

Cassandra reached for her phone, patting her pockets to remember which one she had stored it in, swaying in her post-vomit haze. She flipped it open with one finger, her vision blurred by the tears from either reflex or terror that brimmed her eyes. She thumbed through her contacts, stopping the "G" surnames. Before she could go further, her phone started to buzz in her hand. Will Graham's contact photo stared her in the face. He was calling her. She did not hesitate, her thumb immediately pressing the green button to accept the call.

She placed the phone to her ear.

"Where the *hell* are you, Guillaume?"

"You selfish piece of shit!" Will stormed into the house, screaming his head off, only to find it empty. Well, almost. The dogs perked up from their beds in the living room, bleary-eyed from their nap. Will only counted three of them. One three-legged doberman was missing. The rest of the house was quiet. The only sound was the constant dripping of the sink. Drops of water plodding against the stainless steel in a slow, steady beat. Will growled, kicking the extra shoes tucked next to the door.

Winston barked three times, getting up out of his bed and trotting to the backdoor. He nosed at it and turned to look at his dad. Will jogged across the kitchen, following Winston's hint. Will pet the dog's head thoroughly, but quickly, pressing down on his head and scratching behind his ears with his blunt nails. Will yanked open the door and ran outside, finding himself entering the barn. Sasha yipped, her docked tail wagging with so much force her butt wiggled.

Hannibal stood in the back at the freezer with the door open, his chest pressed against the lip of the chest as he reached inside. Sasha ran to greet Will, but he whistled sharply, Sasha sitting down at his feet. Hannibal turned his head to the side, greeting Will with a charming look from deep inside the barn. Will stood with his chin tilted into his chest, his shattered mirrors for eyes catching Hannibal in their reflection.

"With this assortment of meats, I would like to prepare a popular Italian dish. Saltinbocca, traditionally made with veal wrapped in fresh prosciutto and sage, then marinated in wine." Hannibal stood up straight, removing his hand from the freezer while inspecting a well wrapped cut of meat. "We do not have veal, but pork must suffice us tonight. Regardless, it will be simple, yet delectable."

"You cheated." Hannibal simply blinked, quirking his head to the side at the accusation.

"Pardon me?" He set the meat back in the freezer, shutting the lid.

"You took my game and twisted the rules for your own benefit. I'd call that cheating," Will jabbed, prowling closer, but maintaining his distance from Hannibal in the corner of the barn. Hannibal's look of innocent obliviousness disappeared with a blink, replaced with a cold smile. Will stared straight ahead at him, taking a few seconds at a time to look away and focus on something else, his skin crawling if he stared into his unmasked eyes too long.

The carefully crafted person suit crumbled away as Will continued to claw at the seams, loosening the sutures and ripping it away to scrutinize the monster underneath. Hannibal was silent, appearing to heighten as the monster was released, stretching all his limbs that had been contorted inside, stitched away below the surface of his borrowed human skin. Hannibal did not speak, but Will did, rather loudly.

"Now that I know, are you going to make good on your promise? Disembowel me? Feed me to my dogs?" He stalked closer, each step slow and steady, his shoulders rounding as his stomach churned, his eyes darkening from the shadows they reflected.

"Do you know why you haven't killed me, Will?"

"Because I was supposed to kill you, here and now?" Will snarled, halting his pacing a couple feet away, close enough to grab Hannibal by the throat. "How'd you say it all those nights ago? You'd rather me kill you with my bare hands. I reckon I'd enjoy that very much," Will's voice dropped in pitch, a rasp in his throat as he drawled on. Hannibal spoke again while Will lunged at him, not flinching as he willingly allowed Will to grab at the fabric of his clothing, wrapping his hands around Hannibal's throat.

"The reason you haven't killed me is because we are just alike." Will's fingers twitched, pressing pressure on his trachea. Hannibal stood still, not defending himself. He continued to speak.

"The Rougarou parades as a righteous killer. Will Graham is not a righteous man, therefore he could never be fueled by such a code of morals. You kill because you have the capacity to imagine." His voice started to rasp as Will placed more pressure on his throat, choking him slowly. "You and your brilliant imagination. You kill them to torture her, because you cannot kill her. You want to kill her, but you cannot, so you play pretend, substituting others to chase the thrill you so crave. But it hasn't been satiated, has it, Guillaume?"

Will placed his entire hand over Hannibal's throat, veins in his forearm bulging as he choked Hannibal, who now wheezed. Will continued to squeeze until Hannibal was no longer wheezing, but his mouth gaping as he could no longer make a sound. Hannibal's hand finally flew up to his neck, trying to pry away Will's hand.

Will tutted in disappointment, releasing Hannibal's neck from his clutch. Hannibal gasped for air, his chest heaving as he finally regained control over his breathing.

“You don’t trust me,” Will stared Hannibal dead in the eyes, veins bulging in his neck, fury seeping from his pores. "You never have." He pulled out his phone and dialed a number without looking away. The phone rang twice before the line clicked. Will placed the phone on speaker.

"Where the hell are you, Guillaume?" Will stared Hannibal straight in the eyes, now closer, only a foot separating them.

“Cas," Will willed his voice to break as he whispered frantically, "I'm at home." Hannibal swiped his hand out to grab the mobile, but Will anticipated it, catching him by the wrist. With a grin spreading on his lips, he faked a shaky breath, pleading into the phone while he stared Hannibal dead in the eyes.

"The Rougarou is here. Please, hurry,” Will slammed the phone shut, his fake sobs ceasing with the call. He looked up through his lashes at Hannibal, whose eyes only smoldered in a white-hot anger. Will did not look away once. With an unwavering smile, Will tucked his phone back into his pocket, mocking him with a bashful look.

“Now, you have no choice but to trust me,”

The front door to Will's house burst open, Cassandra rushed in with her gun drawn, her dark eyes zoned in, sweeping the house in a matter of seconds. The kitchen and living room were empty, the lights shut off. The dog beds were all empty. She squinted as she counted a fourth one. She inched into the house, finger on the trigger as she halted beside the bathroom door. She busted it open, pointing her gun. The bathroom was empty.

Releasing another shaky breath, Cassandra swallowed the taste of bile. She toed over to the bedroom door, the wooden floor of the living room creaking under her shoes. She jumped at the sound of water hitting metal. She whipped her head around to look back into the kitchen. The sink faucet dripped again, making the same sound. Cassandra turned back around at the sound of the bedroom door creaking open.

Cassandra breathed in sharply with her back to the wall. She let herself close her eyes for a second, bracing herself for what she might find. Without another second, she leaned into the door, pointing her gun into the small room. The bed was neatly made, not a wrinkle in the comforter. The sheets did not poke out down the sides of the mattress. The pillows were perfectly fluffed. The bedroom was empty.

Panting as the adrenaline coursed through her veins, Cassandra lowered her gun. She wiped the sweat from her brow, turning to look back into the living room. A warm breeze blew through the house, the curtains to the living room window soaring aside, revealing a view of the backyard. She squinted her eyes in confusion, walking closer to the window. She pushed the curtain aside, looking through the screen of the open window.

The black Bentley was not parked in the back anymore. Cassandra jumped, her shoulders tensing around her neck where her hair began to stand on end as a dog's howl pierced through the quiet tension of the house. The howl was joined by a chorus of dogs barking. Equally startled birds scattered out of the trees that surrounded the old barn.

Cassandra bolted for the back door, ripping it open and rushing down the porch steps. She ran through the wild grass, left to grow tall in the field behind the house. The barking and howling became louder as she reached the front of the barn. She looked at the shut doors and down at the gun in her hand. With hair still standing on end, goosebumps littering her skin, Cassandra hesitated as she holstered her gun.

With both hands now free, she heaved the giant barn doors open, groaning as she dug her heels into the ground for the momentum. Once she had finally pushed just one of them aside, a choked sob escaped her lips, her knees buckling underneath her. She grabbed at the wooden door frame to catch herself, splinters slicing through the delicate skin of her palms that remained in between old callouses, piercing the skin and sliding underneath.

In the center of the barn, Will lay flat on his back, collapsed on the floor. His hands clutched his stomach, his shirt torn and dark red, the fabric sticking to his skin. He did not writhe. His hands clutched at his stomach, cradling his ripped flesh in his hands. His breath was ragged as he bled out from his lower abdomen that painted his hands red, still wet and shining under the yellow barn light. He was beautiful, tanned skin whitening as crimson, silk sheets billowed out of his shredded stomach and making the bed of blood-red fabric he lay in. His paling skin was like ivory piano keys, the music erupting from his very being.

Chapter End Notes

...I understand if you're upset, feel free to yell at me in the comments. The dominoes are starting to fall...and there's nothing I can do about it (well I technically can because I'm the author but--shhhh).

Seriously, a big thanks to you guys! See you next time!

INTERMISSION: A Waste of Meat

Chapter Notes

Happy September 10th!

I wanted to put together this mini-chapter to celebrate the 10th of September as it is upon us in real life!

So, I hope you were paying attention to some names, because this chapter gives us a little insight into the beginnings of the Rougarou.

The next regular chapter is still planned to drop on Tuesday!

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sparks flew from Will's hand, his thumb flicking away at the lighter. An unlit cigarette hung from his lips, refusing to light. His back rested against a brick wall, the cold seeping through his shirt and cooling his back. The chatter of people and the clattering of glasses floated through the bar doors every time they opened, becoming ambient noise when they closed.

"Are you a gardener? Because we should put our two lips together," Will glanced up, watching as a blond man walked towards, the door to the bar falling shut behind him. The noise died down again as it closed. The street was quiet, except for the light that flickered occasionally accompanied by a constant, irritating buzz.

Will threw his cigarette on the ground, stomping it out. He twisted the ball of his foot into the pavement, pocketing his lighter.

"Fuck off," Will pushed himself off of the wall, starting to walk away when the guy raised his voice, offended.

"What's the matter? You not into dudes or something?" Will turned back to the inconvenience of the evening with an exhausted huff.

"I am, just not asshats like you," Will grumbled under his breath as he continued to walk away, down the empty street. Before he could get far the man grabbed his hand, causing Will to stumble backwards. The blond pulled him close, the smell of alcohol drifting from his pores.

"Come on, baby," The man whined and Will looked back at him. His narrowed eyes glinted in recognition. In a split second, Will softened his face, his brow smoothing out.

"Okay," Will agreed, the man taken aback by the sudden change of attitude. He stared at Will with a surprised stupor coloring his face. Will spoke again before he had the chance to recover, dropping his voice into a low, dulcet tone.

"But we're going to my place," Will grabbed the man's hand, dragging him back behind the bar towards the parking lot. The blond followed after, willingly, tripping over his feet as Will quickly led him down the alley.

The blond waltzed into Will's house, Will following close behind. Once inside, the man began to strip, pulling his shirt off over his head, his back still facing Will.

In one fluid movement, Will grabbed the cutting board off of the countertop and smacked the man over the head. He fell to the floor, his forehead smacking into the tile. Will stepped forward, standing over him. He looked down at the man, groaning and rolling around on the floor. Will reeled his leg up, stomping the back of the man's head with his boot until he no longer moved. Drops of blood decorated the kitchen floor, pooling from the new wound on his head.

Will crouched down, pushing the man over onto his back. Looking over his unconscious body, Will heaved him up onto his feet, throwing the man's arm over his shoulder. The dogs trotted over at the sound of the commotion, watching Will curiously as he half-dragged, half-carried the man over to the back door. Will maneuvered the man so he was propped up between himself and the wall, trying to open the door.

Will turned around, moving him again to hold his body by the armpits. He dragged him out the door backwards, the man's heels sliding across the floor, down the steps of the patio, and through the field towards the barn. The dogs continued to follow them, trying to sniff at the man's feet when they caught up to them.

Will dropped the man's body on the ground carelessly, needing both hands to open the large barn doors. He picked up the man and dragged him inside.

The dogs lay at Will's feet, looking up at him and whined as he simply sat in the barn, staring blankly at the scene across from him. A lit cigarette hung from his lips, his fingers wrapped around it as he took a drag. His hand fell to his side, the cigarette between his fingers at his side. His jaw fell open lazily, smoke wafting out from his lips in a prolonged puff.

The blonde was slumped in the chair across from him, set on a blue tarp. He was restrained, his wrists and ankles bound to the arms and legs of the chair. His head hung forward, his chin tucked into his chest. Blood dribbled down his forehead, leaking from the large split in the skin. The blond hairs of his sideburns were dyed brownish red with blood.

Will tilted his head to the side as the man began to wake up, groaning before he had begun to move. The cigarette continued to smolder. The blonde picked his head up off of his chest, his body instinctively fighting against the restraints as he woke up.

"W-what? What the fuck did you do to me?" He yelled, his voice cracking.

Will didn't answer. He stood, the dogs jumping to their feet as he stood. Will approached the man slowly, looking at the ground. Will took another drag from his cigarette as it burned close to the filter. He let the smoke rest in his mouth as he approached, letting the taste settle on his tongue.

He leaned down, his free hand hanging from his pocket and the burning cigarette in the other. Will's mouth fell open, blowing the smoke into the blonde's face. The man began to cough violently as the smoke seeped into his mouth and his nose. Will pressed the burning cigarette into the man's bare shoulder.

The man yelped as the cigarette sizzled against his skin, a smile twisting Will's lips upwards. Will continued to press firmly, welcoming the smell of burning flesh. He inhaled deeply, the aroma of charred skin settling as a taste on the very back of his tongue.

Will removed the cigarette butt only when it was finally put out. He flicked it to the ground and reached into his pocket, grabbing his pack of cigarettes and lighter. He lit another one with ease, the flame flicking to life on the first try. He inhaled as the flame touched the tip of the cigarette. He took another deep inhale, blowing smoke in the man's face again. He squinted, tilting his head to the side as he looked briefly into the man's eyes, his pupils dilated.

"I'm expediting your expiration date." Will took his gaze away from the man immediately and sucked in another puff of smoke.

The man wriggled against the rope restraints, the skin underneath rubbing raw. Will simply watched the man as he struggled in panic, a bored look on his face as he continued to smoke.

"Help! Someone help me!" The man screamed as he tried to pry himself free to no avail. Will blew the smoke out of the side of his mouth. He flicked the cigarette, letting the ash fall to the ground.

"No one can hear you," Will spoke in a hushed voice. He returned the cigarette to it's rightful place between his lips.

"What do you want? Take my wallet, I won't say anything!" Will took another drag. He stared at the man's feet, his loafers falling off as he struggled.

"Please! What do you want from me? I'll do anything!" Will looked up, looking at the man's forehead instead of at his eyes.

"I want you dead," Will glanced at his cigarette, frowning as it burned close to the filter. He stepped forward, the man pushed himself against the back of the chair, trying to stay away. Will grabbed his shoulder roughly to stop him from moving. Lining up the lit cigarette with the other fresh burn, Will pressed it down into his skin. The man yelled out curses as he was burned again.

Will tutted as he dropped the cigarette butt onto the floor next to the other. He turned his back, walking over to the rack of tools that hung on one of the walls without a word. Will surveyed his collection, his mouth twisting in disappointment as nothing caught his eye. He glanced back at the blond strapped into the chair. He had thrown his head back, eyes squeezed shut as his face screwed up in pain. His lips moved as he recited a silent prayer.

Rolling his eyes, Will looked over to the old boat motor in the corner, the tools he was tinkering with laid out across the floor. Will smacked his lips together, eyes locking onto the wooden handle of a very specific tool. He bent down to snatch it up, re-approaching the man that was at his mercy.

"Don't come near me with that! Please!" The man eyed the hammer in Will's hands, his eyes wide and locked onto the tool his assailant brought back. Will did not seem to hear the man as he pleaded. He grabbed one of the man's hands by his wrist, squeezing tightly.

"No, no, no, no, no! Please!" The man began to blubber, snot gushing from his nostrils. Will raised the hammer above his head. "PLEASE!" Will brought the hammer down in one fell swoop. The man screamed as the hammer shattered the delicate bones of his fingers. Will brought the hammer above head again, bringing it down a second time, hitting the rope directly, snapping the blond's wrist through the restraints. His head rolled back, his eyes fluttering shut as his body tried to pull him into unconsciousness.

Will brought the hammer up again for a third time Before he could bring the hammer down again, there was a high-pitched whine from the entrance. It was not human. Will looked towards the open door. Winston, Buster, and Hawkie sat patiently at the door. Winston let out a bark, while Buster stomped his front paws into the ground. Hawkie whined again, her tail wagging.

"Vous-avez faim?" *You're hungry?*

The dogs let out a chorus of loud barks, jumping to their feet. Buster ran around in circles, while Winston and Hawkie raced each other back to the house. Will looked over at the man he had just begun to torture. He drifted in and out of consciousness, his moaning quiet now. Will rounded the man silently, placing his hand on his hand, disfigured from the broken bones twisting it in all unnatural directions. Will squeezed his broken hand. The crunching and grinding of the bones was drowned out by the man's screams as he shot back awake. Will waited for his screams to quiet down before hissing a threat directly in his ear.

"If you move as much as an inch, I will carve you open." Will released his mangled hand, heading back towards the house.

The dogs were already waiting on the porch, vibrating in excitement as Will climbed the few steps. He opened the door, the dogs clambering in after him. Will opened one of the cabinets and grabbed the giant plastic bin he kept the dog's kibble in. When he opened the lid, he found very little.

"Fuck, I forgot to pick some more up," Will apologized to the dogs, kneeling to grab Hawkie's head and giving her a scratch behind the ears. She licked his face, slobbering his cheek. A wide, genuine smile brightened his face. Winston and Buster nosed their way in, forcing their faces in Will's hands. A full-bellied laugh erupted out of his mouth.

"I can't leave him here alone," Will spoke to his dogs who continued to climb over him and lick him affectionately. He looked back at the patio door as he contemplated, Winston's furry tail smacking into his side as he wagged it. His eyes darkened as he continued to think. His eyes found the blood on the floor. He caught Winston's tail in his hand, raking his fingers through the soft fur. Will climbed to his feet, and grabbed their food bowls. He let out a sharp whistle.

The dog's claws clattered against the tile floor of the kitchen. following him as he headed out the door and back to the barn. All three dogs trotted dutifully behind him, following him straight back to the barn. He headed for the tool bench again and whistled again, a different pattern. The dogs sat down in the middle of the barn, looking at the man tied up. Their noses wiggled as they smelled him from afar, but waited for further instruction.

Will found the hatchet that hung on the wall. He tapped his fingers against the rough wood of the table, staring at the bits of his reflection he could make out in the lightly rusted blade of the hatchet.

Will snatched it off of the wall and pivoted towards the man. He frowned as he found him with his eyes closed, breathing rough as he tried to fall out of consciousness.

Will brushed the blade against the man's jaw line. His frown deepened as the blade did not rouse him. His free hand shot down, squeezing the skin sack full of broken bones.

"Rise and shine!" Will grunted loudly over the man's whimpers, jolting awake. His eyes bulged as he saw the hatchet hanging by Will's side.

"What are you doing? Please, just kill me. No more, please!" Will turned to look at his dogs, a heavy sigh on his tongue.

"The dog's gotta eat. And you," Will inhaled, rubbing his mouth with the palm of his fidgeting hand. He started to laugh, looking back at the man. "You've done horrible things. You deserve to die. But letting your body rot?" In an instant, Will raised the hatchet and swung down, chopping through the flesh of the screaming man's forearm. Blood gushed forth from the gash in his elbow. Will's entire body wound up and hacked at his arm again, cracking through the bone. The blond man's voice broke as a blood curdling scream filled the barn. His screams broke again, rasping as he screamed his throat raw.

Will grabbed his arm and yanked, the last inches of fat and muscle that connected his arm to his body resisting. Will sawed the rusty hatchet blade through the remaining inches of flesh. The blond's head fell back, finally falling unconscious, from the shock or the pain. Whichever came first. Will threw the man's severed arm into one of the dog's bowls. Buster approached first, sniffing at it cautiously before licking at the blood.

"Letting your body rot would be a waste of meat,"

"The body of Parker Hayes was found last night in the waters of Baton Rouge, along the side of Route one." Will took a sip of his coffee, lounging on the couch as he watched the news. Winston lay on the couch beside Will, curled up in a ball as he slept. Will ran his fingers through Winston's coat. Watching with a calm smile on his face.

"The victim had recently been acquitted on charges of assault in the first degree. The prosecution's main evidence was thrown out by the judge on claims of evidence contaminat--," Will muted the television, his phone ringing and buzzing against the coffee table. Placing his coffee mug on the wood with nothing underneath, he picked up his phone.

"Morning, Cas," Will greeted, his voice rough with sleep. His eye caught movement from one of the dog's beds. Hawkie was still asleep, but Buster was gnawing on a small piece of bone. He smiled at the sight.

"I just saw the news. I'm on my way now."

Chapter End Notes

Don't forget to check out the Spotify playlist for this fic and the awesome new fanart by The_Grey_Lady_Weeps embedded back in Chapter 6!

Thanks for your readership! Hope you enjoyed this little treat!

My Sweet William

Chapter Notes

Here we are! Today's chapter is a short one, but that does not negate its importance.

I hope you enjoyed the September 10th Special...now we're back to our regularly scheduled program!

TW: Panic attacks, just lots of blood you guys. I used the word 22 times.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Cassandra stumbled forward, pure anguish expelling from her body through a single cry as she fell to her knees. Her trembling hands hovered above Will's carved open skin, blood gushing through his fingers and down his wrists. He shuddered on the ground, his body shaking as he blinked his eyes open. He bit down, his jaw clenching from the force. Cassandra placed her shaking hands on his bloody ones, blinking away her tears to see clearly. Will inhaled a shaky groan as his hands were removed from his abdomen. Cassandra's shoulder shook as she let out a sob, the tears she had blinked away returning quickly as Will suffered with his pain.

"I just need to check your wound, okay?" Cassandra swallowed the lump in her throat, flinching at the sound of Will's groans of protest. Still, she lifted his bloody hands away from his stomach, gingerly grabbed the fabric of his button down and undershirt in between her fingers. The wet fabric peeled off of his skin to reveal the true state of his mangled stomach.

He was cut deep from one side of his stomach to the other, stretching the width of his abdomen on the plane just above his belly button. The wound squelching as his diaphragm worked tirelessly to keep him breathing, his skin wet with a shade of red more vibrant than a bed of rose petals. Will wailed as the fabric brushed up against his raw skin. Tears overflowed onto Cassandra's cheeks.

Cassandra swallowed the empty contents of her stomach that began to rise in her throat once more. She chewed on the inside of her cheek, tearing away bits of mucous covered skin that lined the inside of her mouth. She set his hands down gently, hushing him gently.

"Ça va aller," *It will be okay* .

She reassured Will, but also herself. She reached for her phone from her pocket. She flipped it open, her fingers bloodying the keypad as she began to dial a number.

A bloody hand grabbed her wrist. Cassandra gasped sharply, whimpering as he squeezed her wrist so tightly that the phone fell out of her hand, clattering to the ground. She looked down, finding Will looking up at her with half-lidded eyes with his hand clenched around his wrist. Cassandra's eyes were like a doll's wide and glassy. Except, hers were not present, but unfocused and wild. He groaned, his vocal cords coming to life.

“Cas,” Will rasped out, sweat dripping down his forehead. She returned his grip, holding onto his arm by the forearm. She clutched onto him with both hands as she began to plead. Cassandra broke

down.

"Please, stay with me." Tears streamed down her face, blurring her vision. Her breathing quickly became shallow in her blubbering, snot mixing with her tears until it was unclear where one started and the other began. Cassandra's eyes ran up and down Will's weakening body rapidly. A glaze fell over her eyes, the glassy brown dulling, her pupils dilated. A shaking hand flew to her chest as she gaped for air, her shallow breaths quick and raspy. She continued to repeat herself, but she was unintelligible as her sobs overcame her. That is, until she did have a moment of clarity as a shiver ran down her spine as she visibly shuddered.

"Please stay with me, *Eddie* ,"

A beat of silence filled the room. Will's lips twisted into a smile, his brows still furrowed from the pain. He let out a chuckle that started deep in his chest, soon beginning to laugh until the pressure pushed out a heavy amount of blood. He clutched his stomach, cursing from the pain of laughing.

Cassandra did not speak, now holding her breath as her body simply refused to let her breathe. Her jaw stuck open in horror. She froze, all of her body locked into place. She did not move. Her hands were cold against Will's bloody stomach. Bumps on her skin rose, every hair on her body standing on edge. Her braid had loosened, skewed sideways.

Cassandra did not speak because she could not.

"I knew you still felt guilty. I knew it so well that--," Will interrupted himself, hissing at the pain. Still, he forced himself to look Cassandra dead in the eye.

"I asked him to do this to me,"

As her eyes widened and she stared in shock, large hands wrapped around Cassandra's neck. Her fingers rushed to pull at the ones choking her. She wriggled in Hannibal's grip, kicking her legs at the ground and the air as the hands choking picked her up off of the ground.

"Is this how he looked?" Will's face scrunched up in pain as he tried to sit up, blood pouring from his opened skin, dripping between his fingers and staining the floor. He pressed his shirt to the wound, trying to stop the bleeding. With his other hand, he reached for the phone Cassandra had dropped beside him.

"I know your guilt, Cassandra. From the very moment we met, you've always seen me as a victim." Will placed the weight of his body on his shaky legs, using the wall to brace himself as he stood. He unbuttoned his shirt, shedding the outer layer to reveal the white undershirt underneath. He leaned up against the wall with a groan, wrapping the button down around his wound like it was gauze.

"Always trying to protect me-- FUCK!" Will cursed, tightening the makeshift bandage around his middle. "You never could. It was never your job. And you never had to." Will winced as he fastened the shirt around his waist.

"William," Will interrupted Hannibal before he could finish.

"I got it, darlin'." Will flashed a toothy, lopsided grin. He winked at Hannibal. "Don't you worry your pretty, little head," With one hand on the wall, Will stumbled forward towards Hannibal and Cassandra. Cassandra sputtered as they spoke, unable to speak as her vocal cords were put under

immense pressure as Hannibal slowly crushed her neck. She wriggled in his grip, her fingers pulling his hand away from her throat as he choked her slowly.

"You took my father's brain. I'm gonna enjoy taking yours. And hey," Will rested his head on the wall, his other hand holding the fabric across his stomach.

"They Rougarou will stop, just like you wanted him to. He will die with you." Hannibal looked at Will from over Cassandra's head. Like always, his eyes schooled emotion away. But, the man with mirrors for eyes and mind could truly see what was underneath, peaking beyond the loosened stitches of the monster's person suit. Like elusive grains of sand, Hannibal's eyes gleamed with concern and confusion. Will met his eyes with a reassuring smile.

"Thunderstorms, Cassandra." The corners of Hannibal's eyes creased at Will's words, the whites of his eyes like pearls as they became wet. With her free hand, Cassandra elbowed backwards, swinging but hitting nothing but air. She kicked backwards, aiming for his shins. Hannibal skirted around her elbow and her kicks. She grunted as she struggled, occasionally a wheezy cry escaping from her vocal cords.

"Death and destruction are necessary for something more beautiful to emerge," Will groaned, his legs buckling underneath him. "Someone taught me that recently. You've seen his work, I'm sure. When beauty emerges in death. I'll be sure to paint you a pretty picture. Don't want to disappoint," Will clicked his tongue as if he tasted something bitter.

"Hannibal," Will's voice grew weaker. Hannibal tightened his grip on Cassandra's neck, understanding their collective need to hurry.

"The way in which I've cut you avoided major injury. We shall properly dress your wounds momentarily. Do not fret, we shall wake her later when you have rested." Will relaxed. He threw down Cassandra's phone, watching it shatter against the beaten dirt floor. "I would hate to rob you of such a handsome becoming,"

"Lay your head back." Cassandra's eyes widened in shock. Her heart slammed against the bone prison cage deep inside her chest. Will's voice was calm.

"Imagine water rushing into your mouth and nose. Feel as it plugs your ears, blocking every single sound. The cicadas, the birds, and every single sound of the world. It will all be quiet. And then, the only thing you'll be able to hear is the guilt as you let it finally swallow you whole,"

Hannibal's fingers tightened around her throat, her heart thrumming in his hands. Her eyes rolled upwards, her lids fluttering shut. Her knees started to buckle underneath her. Cassandra began to fall limp, Hannibal's hands around her neck the only thing holding her up.

His hands fell away from her neck as he keeled over himself, falling backwards. He knocked himself into the workbench, the blunt edge of the wooden table top assaulting his lower back. His head slammed backwards, hitting the wall full of Will's tools.

"Hannibal!" Will yelled, trying to stand, but he stumbled, his face pale from loss of blood. The workman's tools rattled around Hannibal, a familiar hatchet falling off the magnet from where it hung, disturbed by the shaking of the wall. Hannibal pushed himself off of the workbench, grabbing the hatchet Will had knocked him out with on their first night together. He twirled it in his hand, testing its weight and familiarizing himself with it.

At the same time, Cassandra had fallen forward, gasping for air as she stumbled and fell to her hands and knees. She swayed back and forth, her bloodshot eyes bulging from their sockets. She heaved, her chest expanding as she finally regained control over her lungs. As quickly as the air rushed back into her lungs, she began to cough it back up, her body retching. Her hand snapped to her waist, sparing a breath and closed her eyes in a minute moment of relief. She palmed the handle of her gun and pulled it out of the holster. She concealed it underneath her, hiding it with her body as she curled over it, her forehead on the ground. Her nostrils flared as she closed her eyes and mouth. She forced herself to breathe deeply, listening to what happened around her.

The dirt was cool in between her fingers, warm from their coat of freshly spilled blood. Sawdust and the smell of damp earth would have tickled her nose if it was not for the potent smell of metal. Freshly spilled blood smelled clean. Footsteps tread lightly behind her, a few heavier than the rest. A stumbling from behind her. Hannibal approached Cassandra from behind, staggering in his concussed daze. He raised the hatchet, his body winding up. She clicked the safety off of her gun.

As Hannibal swung down aiming for her neck, Cassandra pushed herself upright, twisting around. Cassandra howled as the hatchet sliced deep into her shoulder. Still, she shoved the barrel of the gun straight into Hannibal's stomach.

A gunshot echoed as dusk settled in and the sky began to blush pink.

Time moves slowly when someone you love is dying. It moves slowly and at the same time becomes surreal.

Will's screams were dissonant, drowning out the croaking frogs and the chirping cicadas of dusk. Hannibal crumpled to the floor, his knees hitting the ground. His fingers hovered over his stomach, touching the blood that began to seep forth from the new hole in his stomach. He fell onto his side, tears pricking the corners of his eyes. Will clattered to the floor. He crawled over to Hannibal, his own wound forgotten about. He grabbed the collar of Hannibal's jacket as soon as he was in reach. He tugged him towards him, his hands ripping the jacket. He continued to pull, a guttural cry ripping through his throat as he dragged Hannibal to him.

He heaved him into his lap, wrapping his arms around him. Will cradled Hannibal to his chest, wiping his bangs out of his eyes. He ran his hands through his straight dark hair. Hannibal blinked slowly at Will, a proud smile gracing his lips. Will sobbed, his tears rolling off of his face and dripping onto Hannibal's cheeks, like rain pouring down onto the earth. Hannibal's bloody hand reached up to touch Will's face, shaking until steady against his cheek. Will nuzzled into his bloody touch.

"My sweet William," His voice was hoarse, his accent thick, "You are magnificent,"

"No, no, don't close your eyes," Will sobbed, pressing his hand into the bullet wound. "Don't leave me. You can't do this to me," Hannibal smiled warmly.

"The moon will be beautiful tonight--" With a hand wet with his own blood, Hannibal tucked Will's curls behind his ear. "--If it is my time, I wouldn't mind dying,"

"Guillaume," Cassandra's voice cut through the air. Will looked at her from where she lay on the floor, the hatchet buried deep in her shoulder. Blood trickled down her arm. She pushed herself up on her one, unscathed arm. The other lay limp, twisted unnaturally, broken from her fall. Her gun lay beside her on the ground, next to her broken phone.

"I told you one day you'd understand," Cassandra looked at Hannibal who lay in Will's arms. He scowled from where he lay as Cassandra's soft voice lilted in his ears as she lamented. "I'm sorry I could never help you."

"You still haven't." Will stared Cassandra dead in the eyes, veins bulging in his neck. Fury seeped from his pores. "And you never will,"

Will whistled sharply three times. The dogs bounded around the corner with their hackles raised, growling. While they ran in, surrounding Cassandra's bleeding body on the ground, Sasha shuffled in after the other three, cautious but curious as she stayed at the door. She sniffed the air and immediately looked at Hannibal's body laying in Will's lap. She began to whine loudly and trotted over to Will and Hannibal. The others growled and barked, their snarls vicious as they bared their wolfish canines.

Will greeted Sasha with a smile as she licked his and Hannibal's faces. She laid herself over Hannibal's body and rested her head on his chest. Will glanced over at the three who surrounded Cassandra's collapsed form on the floor. He whistled once more, catching a glimpse of Cassandra's wet eyes one last time before the dogs pounced upon her.

The three dogs tore into Cassandra, her screams of agony were soon silenced as the ripping of flesh filled the silence of the barn. Will ran his fingers through Hannibal's hair and placed a kiss on his forehead.

As the desk sergeant, Florence Breau took her job very seriously, meaning she was always the first to arrive at the Baton Rouge Police Department. She never had been one to sleep much to begin with, so it was never a big deal. She didn't see a better solution. She walked in every morning to an empty room, flooded by the silent darkness of the early morning, when the sun had not even stirred and the moon was still in the sky. She set her bag down on her desk and found herself walking towards the Captain's office. Captain Poirier's coffee pot seemed to make coffee taste better. Maybe it was the thrill that made it taste better. Fresher and deeper in its rich flavor.

When she rounded to the Captain's office, she stopped short. The lights were left on, but the blinds pulled completely shut. Florence checked her watch.

4:29AM.

"Captain Poirier," She knocked on the door. "You've been staying really late for the past week. But, this is ridiculous. Go home." There was no response. She knocked again, louder this time.

"Captain Poirier," She spoke through the door again, but heard nothing. She placed her hand on the doorknob, pushing it down to open the door.

"For the love of God, get some sleep in your ow--," Florence Breau screamed. For the rest of the day, she did not say anything more.

Her body was slumped on the floor, in front of her desk. Her body faced the door, but her face did not. Her head was tilted back, what remained of her throat laid bare for everyone to see as she faced the ceiling. There was very little left of her neck, just enough flesh and muscle to keep her head slumped against the desk. Her trachea and esophagus were destroyed, entire chunks missing that revealed the damaged vertebrae of her upper spine. There were teeth marks chipped into the bone. Her arms were bound behind her back, one of her legs bent upwards towards her chest. Her foot was nailed into the floor to keep it in place. Although stripped bare, she was clothed in her blood.

Her entire body was marred, littered in skin that was torn open by teeth and claws. Flesh hung off of her bones, some simply peeled back to reveal layers of muscle and fat. Others were missing chunks, flesh torn away and hanging by the sinew of her muscles, revealing nicked bone underneath. The bones of her legs were exposed on her thighs and her knees. The layers of skin completely ripped away. The jagged edges of her flesh were left in ruin, like the rubble of an ancient city, torn away to expose the foundations underneath.

The only clean wound on her body was a large, straight gash in her shoulder. Her chest and stomach were ripped open, claw marks having split her open. A rope-like, fleshy pink tube poured out of her stomach, piled in front of her and in between her legs. Her intestines were still wet, shining under the fluorescent office lights as they sat on the office floor before her. An offering to whoever would find her first.

Her eyes were empty sockets, red tears of blood running down her cheeks. Her mouth was pried open, crimson having gushed out of her mouth and down her chin, dripping down the space in between the soft curves of her breasts. The top half of her skull was missing, as was what would lie inside it. Her skull was shattered and empty, a dark cavity that matched her eyes. Her eyes, mouth, and skull, now empty cavities, were stuffed full of flowers.

Dark crimson Sweet Williams sprouted from the darkness in her head, the color matching the blood that ran down her cheeks and painted her body more red than the dark beige of her skin. More surrounded her, scattered in the puddle of blood that she sat in. Forced to rest eternally in a lake of what kept her alive for half a century.

In Cassandra's dying breath, her death was the birth to the perfect embodiment of the marriage of both the gruesomeness of the Rougarou and the elegance of the Ripper.

On top of the desk, directly behind her head, sat a copy of Virgil's *Aeneid* . Two human eyes sat next to the book, the edges of the optic nerves coming together to touch at the ends, forming a heart. The dark brown irises were but a thin ring obscured by permanently dilated pupils. A human tongue served as a bookmark, delicately placed in between the pages of the Roman epic.

A simple note sat on top of it. It was identical to the note found with the man dead in the tub. The script was by the same hand, penned in blood dried a color of deep brown, similar to freshly watered soil.

In the end, Kassandra always spoke true prophecies. A pity nobody ever believed her.

Chapter End Notes

Like how I used the Death of Marat painting as inspiration for a tableau, our poor Cassandra has been posed like Jérôme-Martin Langlois's painting, Cassandra Imploring Athena for Revenge Against Ajax.

It's a beautiful painting, please check it out!

If you're wondering how in the world I continue the story after this chapter... stick around until next week!

Thanks for the interactions on the story! Cheers!

The Hand of God

Chapter Notes

Welcome back!

I am so excited for this chapter! It contains one of the first things I ever wrote for this work, before it was even fully fleshed out!

That being said, I won't keep you waiting.

Happy Reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Due to the extent of Will's injuries, the wake was pushed to the 10th of September.

Will sat in the upholstered chair that Hannibal had claimed for their morning routine, one leg thrown over the other, his shirt unbuttoned to reveal his heavily bandaged midriff. A shot glass sat beside him on the table, a ring of amber circling the bottom of the crystal. He had placed the used glass on the coasters Hannibal had made for him. A clear bottle of beer hung from between his fingers, the condensation wetting the pads of his fingers. The dogs lay in the beds, watching as Will brought the bottle to his lips, throwing the last drops of beer down his throat. One of the beds, however, was empty. He slammed the bottle down on the table next to the used shot glass.

Placing his sweaty palms on the arms of the chair, he pushed himself up on his feet, slowly and with a loud groan. As he stood to his feet, he swayed a moment, his hand falling to his abdomen. His fingers curled around the texture of fresh white gauze. He shuddered, rolling his shoulders backwards.

Walking into the kitchen, he shed his black suit jacket and draped it over the back of the kitchen chair. The three dogs did not follow. He then went straight for the cabinet under the window. Will grabbed the lighter and the pack of cigarettes and slid open the kitchen window. After rolling up the sleeves of his dress shirt, he placed a cigarette between his lips, he brought the lighter to the tip, cupping his hand around the flame.

He inhaled deeply, inviting the smoke into his lungs. He let his head fall back, closing his eyes as he let the smoke waft through his body, whispering sweet nothings to his body as it damaged it. His mouth soon fell open gently, the smoke taking its leave as it drifted out of his mouth, taking time with its goodbyes. The smoke spiraled around in the kitchen, circling around in a steady stream as it blew towards the window, escaping into the light of the day.

Will flicked the ashes of the smoldering cigarette into the sink, watching them scatter on the wet stainless steel. He stared at the small, obscure pattern it made with tired eyes, the bags underneath them bruised. He clicked his tongue against his teeth, bringing the cigarette to his lips again, the pack of them in his other hand. The dogs stood up lazily, stretching languidly, and then trotting over to follow Will out the patio door.

Will did not lean against the railing, but set the pack of cigarettes and the lighter on it instead. He stood before it, smoking the rest of the cigarette as he watched the dogs scamper down the steps. Hawkie ran ahead, Buster chasing after her with his short legs. Winston sat next to Will, watching him smoke. Will took a deep inhale of the cigarette, the paper burning quickly. He dropped the cigarette butt and Winston watched as it fell to the floor. His ears perked up at the sound of shuffling, looking back up at his owner.

Will grabbed another cigarette, inhaling as the flame hovered over the tail of it. Will looked down at Winston, pulling the cigarette away from his mouth to flash a tight-lipped, closed smile. He blew the smoke out of his mouth, letting the dull pain of his torso wash over him.

"I'll be okay, Winston." He smiled but his eyes drooped, "I'll still have ya'll," Winston craned his head as Will scratched in between his two ears. Winston nudged Will's leg with his snout, leaving shed, golden-brown hair on his slacks. Will gave him one last pet before he trotted down the steps, joining the others.

Will continued to smoke, watching the dogs play and tire themselves out. When the three came trudging back up the stairs, tongues rolling out of their mouths, cigarette butts surrounded Will, the dull yellow contrasting the shiny black of his leather shoes. Will smoked the entire pack.

He pocketed the lighter and opened the door, letting the dogs drag themselves back inside, immediately finding their water bowls. Will followed, shutting and locking the back door behind him.

He was met with the silence of an empty room.

He let out a sigh, shuffling towards the sink. He slid the window shut, switching the latch as he locked it as well. He turned in time to see the three dogs climbing back onto their beds, plopping down as their chests shook with heavy panting. Will's eyes drifted to the fourth bed, cold and empty.

Winston's ears perked up, but he did not move, tired from their morning fun. A few moments later, Will's bedroom door began to creak open. His eyes flitted to the movement. He looked through the cracked open door. No one stood on the other side. Will's eyes lowered to the ground, finding a long, black and brown muzzle pushing the door open. Sasha padded into the living room. The other three's tails started thumping against the ground. Sasha jogged over to the others, licking them affectionately in greeting.

Will walked over to the dogs, reaching down to greet Sasha like the others. Will reached down, running his fingers over the doberman's shiny coat. Sasha turned around, assaulting Will's forearm in licks. His weary smile broke into bright laughter, loud enough to muffle the sound of the creaking door.

"You simply look ravishing in my shoes,"

"You shouldn't be out of bed," Will scowled, his eyes finding Hannibal standing in the doorway to the bedroom. He held onto the frame, bracing his weight on the structure of the house. "You need to rest,"

Hannibal's wide smile revealed his sharp canines.

"I trust my abilities as a surgeon. You should as well, considering we are presently having this very conversation," Will rolled his eyes, carefully leaning down to grab a bottle off the coffee table. It rattled as it flew in the air towards Hannibal.

"You should still be resting. We'll need our strength on the drive out," Hannibal caught the bottle with one hand. He screwed it open and placed two delicately in his mouth. He capped the bottle and tucked it into the palm of his hand.

"By that logic, you should stay home as well to rest."

"No can do, sha. I've gotta shoot the shit with the department. I'm the one who is supposed to be the most upset. You know, cry my lil' eyes out."

Will began to button his shirt up. Beaming at him with affection in his eyes, Hannibal shuffled over to Will. Placing the medication back onto the table, he used his now free hands to place them on Will's, gently pushing them away as he took the fabric into his own. Will looked at Hannibal's bare chest as he buttoned up his shirt for him. With his hands now free, he ran his fingers through Hannibal's chest hair, his touch gentler as he found the matching bandages wrapped around Hannibal's torso.

"Then I shall go with you. I am skilled in this," Hannibal raised his brows, catching Will's eye as he imitated his southern drawl. " *shooting the shit* ,"

Will snickered, the bright smile returning to his face for a brief moment before he doubled over, falling into Hannibal, his arm wrapping around his stomach.

"Fuck, don't make me laugh," Will hissed in pain, his forehead cushioned against the softness of Hannibal's chest hair. Hannibal's arms wrapped around Will's curled back, fingers tracing patterns across his back.

"Breathe, my Sweet William. It shall pass. Embrace the pain as you would embrace myself," He whispered in hushed, dulcet tones, his voice floating into Will's ears like a piano's melody. Cool air blew in a stream from Will's lips as he exhaled against Hannibal's exposed midriff. Hannibal continued to draw delicate designs of flowers across Will's back with the manicured nail of his middle finger.

Will's back soon unfurled, standing back up as the wave of pain passed, receding back into the ocean. Hannibal gently grabbed Will's stubbly chin between his thumb and forefinger, lifting it to have their eyes meet. Hannibal leaned in, Will pulling himself in to his opposing magnet. They came towards each other, closing the small distance between them.

Their kiss was not ferocious in nature, but a serene passion to be cherished. Their lips met like they would never meet again.

"No one knows who you are, or that you're even here. Making a story up about you would be too complicated. A lie of omission will be just fine," Will smoothed a hand over Hannibal's shoulder, whose brow was slightly creased as he contemplated. A melancholic smile framed his face in a moment of clarity. Will scraped his nails against his chest.

"I'll miss you, darlin'," Will whispered, drawling out his words as if they would be lost to time.

"Although the drive is long, the wake itself should not last more than an hour." Hannibal took Will's chin in his hand once again, leveling their eyes. "Don't fret. We will see each other again soon,"

"Fan-damn-tastic," He purred, baring his teeth in a brutish smile, "We're leaving as soon as I get back. Be ready."

Stealing a kiss from Hannibal lips and nipping at his throat, Will broke their embrace in a twirl. He found his suit jacket on the kitchen chair and pulled it on. He grabbed his keys and headed for the door. He paused, his sweaty hand on the cool metal of the doorknob.

"Hannibal?" Will turned to face the other man, only to find him entering the bedroom. He leaned his entire weight against the frame as he turned to look at Will, sluggish on his feet.

"Nevermind." Will swallowed the three words stuck to his tongue. "Get some rest, sha. I'll be home soon," Will walked out the door and shut the door behind him, leaving Hannibal alone in the house.

Cassandra's wake was closed casket. A sleek mahogany box, clean and immaculate in a room packed with the entire police department. Still, the room was quiet. Will looked on at the crowd from the entrance. He briefly scanned the room, willing his mask to slide over his face, painting an image of Will Graham his coworkers would see. He wouldn't have to wear it with Hannibal. He would see through it even if he did. Will braced himself with a breath that was heavy in his lungs. He would soon let it fall away to disintegrate, like salt in the ocean.

Will stepped forward. A glimpse of red curls caught the corner of his eyes, the hair of a woman tucked away in the back. She paid her condolences from afar. Will paid her no mind. He continued down the aisle.

Captain Lilah Authement of the New Orleans Police Department sat in an aisle seat, crumpled tissues in her fists. Her face was mottled red, the delicate skin around her eyes puffy and irritated. She was still, her body wound up, sitting up like a metal rod ran up the back of her spine. A man approached her, wavy dark hair swooping atop his head, graying at the temples. He reached into his breast pocket, pulling out the navy handkerchief that matched his suit. He offered it to her. She accepted it gingerly. Her lips twitched a moment before her body finally reacted. Her shoulders shook once as she let out a single sob, her posture toppling as her elbows found her knees. She sobbed into her hands, the man's handkerchief in her grip.

He knelt down beside her, a hand reaching to comfort her. The man finally opened his mouth.

"Life is a hell of a thing to happen to someone," Will's ears twitched at the man's distinctly northern accent. He stood only a few feet away from them, his gaze strong even when people walked past him. Will's tongue rolled in his mouth, tucked behind his teeth. Lilah looked up at him, her eyes a flood.

"It shouldn't have been her, David," Lilah was not loud when she cried, but breathy. Her hand clutched at her heaving chest and she squeezed her eyes shut, the tears being pushed out of her eyes, rolling smoothly down her deep skin.

"I know, Lilah," The man, David, comforted. He took her by the arm. "Why don't we go get you something to eat."

Lilah did not budge, sitting there trying to control her breath, the only thing that she could do at that moment. David frowned for a moment, his tired eyes flashing with ideas.

"You know, that night Cassie and I met," Lilah snorted, holding back a laugh as he wiggled his eyebrows at her. "I won her over with my spaghetti. I made it by hand, she ever tell you that?"

Lilah bit her lip, her eyes shining with tears and a fond memory. "She complained that this Italian was *too big for his britches* ," She laughed wetly. "That was the first thing I taught her how to say," The man smiled fondly at Lilah. She wiped her cheeks.

"But, she also said it was the best pasta she'd ever had," Lilah linked the man's arm in hers. "And that the strip poker was an added bonus," Lilah kissed the man on the cheek as they walked. Will avoided them, but they were still in earshot.

"She loved you, you know. She used your recipe the night she proposed. Why else do you think you were invited to the wedding?" The man began to laugh, his smile one-sided, but still just as wide as Lilah's.

"Invited?" David huffed, his upper lip twitching, "I was her best man!" Will watched vacantly as the two took their leave. Others soon flooded around him, shaking his hand and uttering their stale, formulaic condolences. Will participated, expressing his grief to his coworkers simply as a means to pass further up the aisle, searching for a familiar face that did not persuade him to gag. Will eventually made his way to the front row. He sat down and slowly drew his gaze to his right.

Florence Breau sat beside him, stiller than stone. She held an untouched pack of tissues in her lap, tears streaming down her chin and onto her neck, wetting the edge of her black dress. Her eyes stared, unblinking at the casket in front of her. Her fingers clutched at her tights, the fabric beginning to rip under the assault of her nails. Will reached over the armrests, slowly lifting her arm from her lap. He laced their fingers together.

"I was the last one to speak with her on the phone," Will's voice was a whisper. She turned to look at him, her movement slow. He continued, "You probably knew that from the phone records. Department moves fast when it's about the Captain." He grabbed a packet of folded papers from inside his jacket and placed it in her hands.

"Cas was like a mother to me," Will lied. "I can't stay where she and my dad both died." Will placed Florence's hands back into her lap with the papers.

"So, that's my resignation. I'm leaving tonight. Thought you should know, at least," Florence nodded. For the first time since she found Cassandra's body, she opened her mouth to speak.

"I'll take care of it. I'm just glad you're finally getting away from it all." Florence patted his hand, then stood. Will watched as she approached the casket and spoke to it in hushed tones. When she left, Will immediately followed. He approached the coffin without hesitation and stared with his always tired eyes. His eyes flickered up to the photos displayed around her coffin. Will froze as his eyes found a picture dated *1980* in bright orange font.

A twenty something year-old Cassandra grinned widely, her cheek pressed against the small, chubby one of the small boy that she held in her arms. He stared at the camera, his blue eyes wide

open. He clutched a stuffed dog in his tiny fists.

Will looked down at the coffin, then left without a goodbye.

The front door was pushed open with force, sticking to the frame from the humidity. Will came through the other side, his neck tie loosened around his neck, his suit jacket slightly rumpled and folded over his arm. Will slipped the keys into his pocket, tiptoeing his way through the small pack to not step on any paws.

"It's me! Let's hit the road," Will didn't take off his borrowed shoes. They clicked against the dark kitchen tile as he entered. The lights were off in the living room as well. There was no response.

"Hannibal?" Will tried again, his voice rising in pitch. He threw his jacket onto the couch, looking around the room. He found the manuscript placed in the center of the coffee table. Hannibal's red pen sat neatly beside it. Will winced as he bent down, holding his bandaged wound. His fingers ran up the thick layer of pages, then brushed against the pen. He palmed it and slipped it into his pocket.

A loud whine pierced through the air, distracting Will, who looked away from the manuscript. Sasha stood, balancing on her hind legs while her only front paw clawed at the closed bedroom door. Her claws scraped against the door, but it did not budge. Will rushed over to the door.

"Hannibal!" Will grabbed the doorknob, gently ushering Sasha aside. "You better not have died, you bastard!"

He turned the knob and pushed the door open with his shoulder, stumbling inside to find his bed empty and freshly made. The sheets were even as they hung over the edge of the bed, not touching the floor, but functioning as a bed skirt. The comforter was smoothed over, pulled taught over top and tucked expertly. The pillows were fluffed to perfection.

Directly in the center atop the mattress was a bed of Black Mulberries and Sweet Williams. Nestled in the center was a small glasses case and a sealed envelope, stark white against the rich and dark pigments of the flora. Will toed into the room cautiously, but his eyes were wide with frenzy. He found himself standing over the edge of the bed. Their combined scent no longer lingered in the air. Their individual smells of sweat and sex no longer mingled in the air, intertwining in the sweet aroma that was a dance of their own. Will's fingers brushed the envelope, tracing the lines that looped across the paper, ink black strokes staining the white.

Guillaume

He took the envelope into his hands delicately, careful not to disturb the bed of flowers. Will turned the envelope around while retrieving Hannibal's pen from his pocket. Sliding the tip of the pen under the sealed flap, Will tore open the envelope. He pulled out its contents.

In his hands, Will held a small stack of papers. It was a letter.

He began to read.

My Sweet William,

You once told me my eyes were hollow, and still you've placed candles in my empty sockets. It's been too dim for longer than I'd have liked. Preferred, but only enjoyable for a time when alone. I suppose neither of us are alone now. You've shown me a reason to live beyond living. And now, I find myself yearning for you to place candles in my eyes and light them with your cigarette that hangs delicately from your bitten lips at which I love to marvel. How they tear flesh so easily, yet choose to spare mine.

I am not afraid of my fate, because I am forever tethered to you, my darling. The power we wield baffles. Your hand has become mine and mine has become yours. Our hands together, is the hand of God.

I am utterly enraptured, yet equally plagued with apprehension. So you see I must take my leave, but this is not our ending.

You offered me mulberries at the beginning of our journey. A simple fact, I am not sure you remember, but I'm sure you will remember the animosity behind it. I find this fitting. Are you familiar with the Victorian language of flowers? The black mulberry tree, my dear, shouts with abandon. I shall not survive you. How charming. You have not survived me, and yet I have not survived you. We both walk away, licking our wounds. I shall wait for you, Will. Can we survive alone? We have for our entire lives, alone. We certainly can. But should we? What will we choose? I have chosen. What will you choose?

When the two of us have gone, what will be left? Will the wind still carry our scents through the misty breeze of the shore? Our two scents, our breaths, our souls, now and forever inseparable. Will they hear of our escapades? How long will they recognize us? See us? Fear us? We will soon disappear from their dreams and nightmares alike. You will wade into the quiet of the stream, sweet William, but this time, you will not be alone. I will be by your side. We will soon wade into the quiet of the stream together.

To which fate we will succumb, I can never know.

To which muse we will be inspired by next, I crave to know,

To which god we will be struck down by, I openly challenge.

For it is you that I ache for, and I know not an earth where you and I do not breathe simultaneously, side-by-side, as one. As long as we are together, the world can burn. And if you truly wish to burn, I will soak us both in gasoline and strike the match. All in due time.

When you first saw me, and I you, you had given me a wonderful idea. I know where my path leads me next. Will you, my Sweet William, choose to take my hand as we walk into a new chapter together?

When I am gone and we are lost to languish without each other, close your eyes and think of the river. Picture the night we met, on the banks of the rushing waters. Remember our Renaissance. You will always find me there.

Hannibal Lecter, M.D.

P.S. You're not fond of eye contact. With these, it will be easy to avoid the gazes of others. But you, my darling, my sweet William, save your gaze for me, don't you?

Chapter End Notes

...so, how are we feeling?

Thank you for your interaction with this work! I hope you love this fic as much as I do <3

This is not the end... see you next time!

I Still Remember / Happy New Year !

Chapter Notes

Hello! Welcome back!

Apologies for the late chapter! This week has been insane!

A small note, I realized a few hours after I posted last chapter that a crucial detail from Hannibal's letter that has been updated! Thank you for your patience!

This chapter is split in two, one part more detail oriented, the other more dialogue centric!

Enjoy (if possible)!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

December 31st, 2003

White smoke spiraled upwards, billowing into the stale inside of the car as they escaped from chapped pink lips sprinkled with prickly brown stubble. The white clouds were grayish in hue, the color of dull silver. It mingled in the air, either getting swept outside through the cracked window or mingling with the melody that poured from the car's radio speakers. The smoke that stayed in the car intertwined with the dried bundle of dark red flowers that hung from the rearview mirror.

"I can't seem to face up to the facts. I'm tense and nervous, and I can't relax. I can't sleep cause my bed's on fire. Don't touch me! I'm a real live wire!"

Will brought the small bit of the cigarette to his mouth and inhaled, the yellow paper rolled around the filter burning in his mouth. His face scrunched up and he began to cough, flicking the cigarette butt out the window. He focused his eyes on the road, pitch black beyond the lights of his truck. Will reached for the center console and popped it open.

He grabbed the carton of cigarettes that lay inside and grabbed another, taking it to his mouth. He threw the pack back in, the unlit cigarette dangling from his lips as his hand continued to rummage around. Will cursed, his hand coming up empty. He looked away from the road, his eyes flitting down to the consul beside him.

In front, the lighter sat in the cupholder, next to the glasses case, the edge of the cleaning cloth poking through.

Will snatched the lighter and his eyes found the road again. He swerved, readjusting the car to not drive into the ditch. Whining sounded from the back at the sudden jerkiness. Will looked in his rear-view mirror, first catching movement in the dim, red light of his taillights. He looked down to meet the four pairs of concerned eyes among the boxes and cooler sitting in the back.

"Sorry y'all," His voice was gruff as he apologized, but sincere, "I'll make it up to you,"

A flash of red and blue lights reflected in the whites of Will's eyes, a siren whooping behind him a second later. Will huffed. With the roll of the eyes, he threw the lighter back into the cupholder and snagged the fresh cigarette from his lips, tucking it behind his ear. Soft strands of brown hair curled around it.

Will veered the car to the side of the road, the car slowing to a stop. One of the dogs whined again. Will rolled his neck, the tight muscles around his shoulder popping as they stretched. Will let out a soft groan. He looked up to the side-view. Only one man stepped out of the car, a brimmed hat atop his head. Will scoffed a laugh as the man adjusted his hat and pulled at the belt of his uniform slacks. He turned to look over his shoulder, his hand sliding down to unbuckle himself.

"You guys getting hungry?" Winston licked Will's stubbly cheek, prompting a chuckle from his owner. "Alright then," Winston craned his head as Will scratched behind his ears. "Let's get this show on the road,"

Will shifted the car in park, his foot falling off of the break. He rolled the window all the way down and shut off the car. Letting his eyes fall shut, Will's eyes moved back and forth as he fell back into his mind. He slipped into the dark abyss of his mind, letting the ink of the void consume him. He let it creep into his pours, gushing up his nose and into his ears. The insidious dark was a welcome guest as it seeped through every pore. Boots clicking against the pavement tugged him back into reality, but not without latching onto a mask, dusty from disuse.

The footsteps grew louder, but he did not open his eyes. Will slipped his hands onto the wheel, leaning forward, letting his forehead fall against the top of the wheel with a soft thunk. The footsteps grew louder. Will did not open his eyes. His muscles fell loose, his body swaying from side to side. The footsteps stopped outside his door. Will blinked his eyes open, staring at the worn, black leather of the wheel.

"Evenin' sir." Will stared at the officer with teary eyes, his nose and mouth obscured by his flannel-clad arm.

"Do you know why I pulled you over tonight?" The officer touched the brim of his hat, his other hand hanging from his belt. His badge shone brightly, reflecting the light from inside Will's car. Behind his arm, Will's lips twitched in a snarl. It did not reach his eyes. Will shook his head slowly. Opening his mouth, he relaxed his tongue in his mouth like it was paralyzed, just how it had felt the night after he had been drugged.

"Noooo, sirrr," Will slurred, his accent flooding every syllable that poured out of his mouth. The officer looked at him with a raised eyebrow, annoyance glinting in his eyes that had long since dulled with exhaustion.

"I'm going to have to ask you to step out of the car, sir. Can you do that?" Will nodded wordlessly. The officer stepped back from the door. Will pulled the handle of the door and pushed. The dogs laid quietly in the back among the boxes and cooler.

Will swung one foot out and onto the pavement, stumbling as he stood up. He swayed where he stood. The officer frowned and cautiously reached for his arm. Will did not flinch when his arm was grabbed. He fell forward instead, the officer's arm gripping tightly on his upper arm to catch him. Will tried to shrug him off as he caught his own balance, still upright with his feet planted on the ground.

"I'm going to ask you to walk in a straight line. To do that, I'm going to let you go. Can you stand on your own?" Will nodded slowly, a glaze over his eyes as he continued to sway. The officer let go of Will's arm and turned slightly, looking to the white line indicating the shoulder of the road. He began to point, his back to Will.

"Now come over he--," Before the officer could finish his sentence, Will jolted forward, snatching the baton from the man's belt. Without time to aim, Will swung in the general direction of the officer's head. He hit him on the side of the neck and he fell forward, clutching at the throbbing skin.

Will swung again, smacking into the soft part of the officer's skull. He brought both arms over his head and swung down again. And again. And again. He bashed the man's skull, the front of his bloody face, then the vertebrae of his neck. The hollow sound of a crack reverberated in the cool air. Will's chest heaved as the mask of a drunk man melted off of his face, returning to the abyss deep inside his mind. The light extinguished inside of it, leaving shadows to twist and curl inside like wisps of smoke, the walls coated in black soot.

Will tossed the baton aside. The sleek, black rod clattered to the ground, rattling against the pavement. Will fell to his knees over the man who could barely move, paralyzed from shattered cervical vertebrae. His knees protested as they hit the pavement, but Will fell forward, looming above the incapacitated cop. He raised his fist beside his head, slamming it down into the man's face. His knuckles split upon impact with the man's cheekbone. His other wound up quicker than the first but came down just as harsh, smashing into the edge of his eyes socket, his knuckle slamming into the white of the man's eye. He continued, his fists taking turns coming down to pummel the man trapped underneath him. His fists flew faster with each passing moment.

He only stopped when the sound of snuffling reached his ears. He ignored the burning of his lungs as they ballooned in his chest, turning to find Buster sniffing the man's ankle. It was unclear if he was dead or simply dying. Will shuffled himself off of the man whose fate was all but certain. He found the driver's door was still wide open. He looked down at the small, but clever dog. Will looked at his bloody hands, then at the door of his car. He looked the other way, finding the police car still parked on the side of the road.

"Shit," Will cursed under his breath. Buster looked up at him with wide eyes, as if asking what was wrong. Will reached back down at his victim and snagged the fabric of his shirt. He yanked at it, ripping the buttons as he began to strip the man. Off went his shirt, with which he wiped the blood off his hands. Then went his shoes and socks, then his pants. Will removed his clothing clinically, as if he was setting him up for a surgical procedure. He ripped off the man's underwear without second thought, throwing it aside in the pile he had carelessly strewn together.

He left the man where he lay on the ground, jogging over to his car. He opened the back door, letting the other three dogs, Winston, Hawkie, and Sasha out from the back seat. He turned before they had all jumped out. He whistled in a staccato rhythm, the dogs' paws padding silently behind him on the pavement. Will reached the man's body, whistling again as he did so. The dogs obeyed. The wet sound of muscle being ripped from bone filled the air, Will lazily reaching down to the heap of clothes. He ripped a piece of fabric from the pant leg, using it to grab the ring of keys that hung heavily inside the pants pocket. He threw the ruined fabric of the uniform back down to the pile. Blood splattered on the ground in front of him, just barely missing the fabric of his boots. Will looked down at it, a fond smile on his face. He merely stepped over it, not letting the bottoms of his shoes get painted in blood.

Still careful not to touch the keys with the skin of his fingers, Will carried the car keys in his makeshift handkerchief. His eyes skimmed over the South Carolina license plate on the front bumper. He unlocked the car and climbed in the driver's side. He opened the patrol car's computer system and deleted the record of this traffic stop. Will sat there afterwards, watching the dogs feast on the man from his own car. Will would have laughed, but instead scanned the scene in front of him. He'd often made bodies vanish, seemingly into thin air, realistically into the bellies of hungry canines. It would be harder to make a vehicle disappear so well. Will's eyes flitted to the woods. With a sigh, Will used the stolen keys to turn the car on. He pulled up his sleeves over his hands so as to not leave his prints on the steering wheel and hit the accelerator. He did not buckle himself.

The car lurched forward, Will turning it to face the woods. He revved the engine. The car sped up. 25 mph. The car jostled as the front tires fell off the pavement and onto the grass. 35 mph. Will watched as the treeline approached. 45 mph. Will set the cruise control and removed his foot from the pedal. 55 mph. He tore the door open and tumbled out, just before the car crashed into the treeline. The front of the car now hugging a large oak tree. Will lay on the grass, panting heavily. He held a hand to his abdomen, as if the old wound would burst. Bruises would adorn his elbows and knees tomorrow. Groaning, Will pulled himself to his feet and stumbled to the shoulder of the road.

The shadow of the four dogs came back into sight as Will returned to his car. Their tails wagged furiously as he approached, Winston tilting his head to the side. He licked his chops, his pink tongue wiping the blood smeared across the fur of his muzzle. Will looked down before them with a growing smirk. The cop’s naked, mangled body lay against the pavement, his chest mauled open, revealing his broken ribs and missing organs that had been stolen away by the jowls of the canines. His dead eyes wide in shock, the only clue of what became of him as his contorted face has since relaxed in the calming embrace of death.

Crouching down, Will braced the man's corpse with both arms. The veins in his arms bulged as he struggled to haul the man into his arms, a loud, guttural groan escaping Will's lips as he strained his body. He dropped the body on the ground, dry winter air pouring down his throat as he heaved through his mouth, a soft wheeze caught in the back of his throat. He stood back up, placing his hands on his hips as he ate the air and contemplated. In another attempt, he reached down again, but this time grabbed the corpse underneath its armpits.

Will leaned back, pulling the body towards the grassy side of the road. He grunted as he dragged the dead man, the corpse's bare heels scraping raw against the rough pavement. He stepped into softer ground, the dirt a greater comfort than the tarred road. Will dragged him towards the treeline, past the front of the police car that had been smashed into a tree. Smoke continued to softly waft upwards into the night sky, disappearing against the vast navy blue canvas.

The two men, one dead and one very much alive, broke through the treeline, engulfed by the symphony of cicadas and toads chirping and croaking in the night. Will's nostrils flared as he inhaled the cool, dry air. Fallen leaves and dead vegetation littered the ground, crunching underneath Will's precise, heavy footsteps and the dragging of the dead man's heels. Will threw the corpse, flipping him over as he let it fall to the ground with a loud thump.

The chorus quieted, a scattered few bravely continuing to sing. Still, the wall of noise parted like a curtain, revealing another precious sound beyond what Will could see in the dark, winter night. Beyond the curtain was the clear sound of trickling water. Will looked up to the dark veil of sky, watching the white dots in the sky twinkle and trick the eye into thinking they were moving. He let

his eyelids fall shut, the rippling water louder growing louder in volume as he let his mind wander towards it, falling in and letting it consume him.

Will's hand slipped underneath his shirt, his fingers finding the smooth scar tissue that marred his lower abdomen. The pads of his fingertips ran over it, tracing the path of the blade. His body shivered from either the cold or the touch, perhaps from both, perhaps not. He took a breath of crisp air that burnt his lungs, words falling off of his tongue.

"I still remember,"

From deep inside the wood, howling echoed, burgeoning forth in the night. Will looked to the shadows of the sky, finding a growing quarter of the moon. The howling did not stop, but more joined the conversation. Sharp barking interrupted the smooth sound, weaving together with the howling. Will turned on his heel as the howling became louder, leaving the body to rot in the forest.

When he emerged, the dogs were gone, already huddling inside the car, except Sasha, who pawed at the step up. Will rounded the edge of the truck and scooped her up, helping Sasha into the back of the car with the others. Will planted a kiss on her forehead before climbing back into the car. Turning the key in the ignition, the car powered to life. Will grabbed his cigarette from behind his ear and placed it in his mouth. He cupped his hands around the edge as he lit it.

Satisfied, he turned the car on with a flick of the wrist. The engine revved as it came alive. Will peeled off the shoulder of the road, his hand reaching to turn the radio back on. Once he started to cruise down the highway, his fingers delicately turned the dial, the volume a quiet hum in the background.

He followed the signs heading north.

December 31st, 2003

"So, is it true?" Hannibal looked over to a tall man, staring down his nose at him, peeking from over the rim of his glasses. Hannibal bit his tongue, his knuckles barely whitening as he tightened his grip around his champagne flute.

"Indeed, Dr. Sutcliffe,"

"Please, Hannibal. Call me Donald. Wouldn't you agree we are friends? You must after we've gone through our entire residency together," Hannibal brought the music of the house to the forefront of his mind.

"A medical residency has proffered healthy competition. One might contest that this reaches the levels of friendship," Hannibal brought the champagne to his nose, inhaling but not yet taking a sip. Donald laughed, placing his empty champagne glass on a server's platter as he walked back. He looked around the room, his eyes widening in delight as he found the server floating around the room with full glasses.

"Well, Hannibal," He dragged out his name, patting him on the back. "You seemed like you were getting bored with surgery. I've got a feeling psychiatry will suit you," Hannibal quirked a smile.

"So, I've been told," Hannibal's gaze was drawn to the dinner table. Having finished dinner earlier in the evening, it had been cleared off of dishes by the hired wait staff. Still, the centerpiece of Sweet Williams adorned the center, having remained there all night.

"The great Doctor Hannibal Lecter!" Dr. Sutcliffe threw his hands up as if he was an ancient crying out to a god. Hannibal preened at the gesture. "Having conquered the body he finds mundane, now challenging the mystery of the human brain,"

"I do believe you've summed that up rather nicely," Hannibal concurred as he moved aside when his old colleague nearly knocked into him.

"Now, I need another glass that I can toast with in about," He looked at his watch, "Just 20 minutes? Wonderful party you've thrown as always, Hannibal. Always the lover of rare treats, the more expensive and difficult they are, the better. And you always pull it off. Well done," Dr. Sutcliffe patted him again on the back, wandering off to find the waiter serving champagne.

Hannibal still did not drink, the rim of his glass untouched. The glass still shone with cleanliness, not a smudge from the touch of one's lips. He turned at the scent laden with chemicals that would make his nose curl if not for the gentle overtones of rose and vanilla.

"Oh! How we've missed you, Hannibal! How lovely for you to return to us!" An older woman exclaimed, her voice akin to a parrot who was left all alone in a cage all day without a soul to talk to. She reached out her hand in front of her, her fingers stretched out and poised.

"Mrs. Komeda, what a pleasure," Hannibal took her delicate hand in his, planting the breath of a kiss on the back of her hand. His lips did not meet her skin, nor did he inhale.

"I can't believe that you were left alone for such a time! How could you leave us without the magic of your dinner parties! Wherever did you run off to?" She did not throw her glass around like the other guest, but gesticulated as if the glass was an extension of her own arm.

"I decided to pass my sabbatical traveling the southeast," Hannibal danced around the topic with a practiced smile. The refined woman gasped loudly, other guests turning to look towards them only for a moment before they returned to their conversations. Hannibal held his smile on his face, Mrs. Komeda staring at him in shock.

"Thank goodness you made it out of there alive! Haven't you heard of the mess that is rattling around down there?" Hannibal neither shook nor nodded his head. His masquerade of a smile did not twitch, let alone falter. Mrs. Komeda went on, throwing a bony hand onto Hannibal's wrist and she squeezed, holding onto him as if he would vanish.

"An absolute terror! I heard on the news that murderers have been running amuck in Louisiana! Just three months ago, a police captain was killed!" She twisted her face in disgust. "So terribly awful! I can't imagine! Oh Hannibal!" She lamented, running her hand up and down his arm, clothed in a classic black tuxedo jacket.

"I'm so glad you returned to us unscathed!" Hannibal's fingers twitched around the glass, resisting the urge to reach for his abdomen. The old bullet wound would start to ache for the rest of the

evening. He clutched the flute harder, the glass warming under his touch. Hannibal readjusted his posture and took a breath, speaking smoothly as he forced a frown.

"An awful fate for such an individual. We can only hope her death was swift and painless." Hannibal's eyes glinted in the light, appearing more crimson than maroon.

"What has become of the investigation?" Mrs. Komeda's eyes brightened at the query, a smile quickly replacing the plague of tragedy from her face. Hannibal's lips twitched as he resisted a smile at her skillful emotional manipulation.

"The FBI has taken over! How exciting! How lovely it is to be here in Baltimore! We are so close to the action!" The older woman buzzed with excitement, having taken hold of Hannibal's wrist again and shaking it.

"Perhaps you could request an interview for research into your novel. You are still writing the thriller idea you had pitched the last time we spoke, correct?"

"What a wonderful idea! Thank you, Hannibal. And I must say, how lovely it is of you to throw a wonderful event for the holiday."

"The pleasure is and always will be mine. Further, it would be such a waste to let such a delectable abundance of meat go to waste." Hannibal offered the first genuine smile of the evening. It was identical to his masquerade.

"Your dinner parties are exceptional!" She had turned back to him, her eyes sparkling with admiration.

"Now, do not mistake the courses to be over," Hannibal corrected her, a single finger pointed in the air. He glanced at the waitstaff who began to set the table for dessert. She followed the path of his eyes.

"The dessert course shall be served after midnight. We shall ring in the new year with beignets served with mulberry jam. A simple, yet exquisite taste. I cultivated the berries and rolled the dough myself," Hannibal's eyes did not leave the table, his careful gaze caressing the floral centerpiece on the table.

"My, Hannibal. Did you meet someone special who taught you that recipe?" Mrs. Komeda pried, her eyes sharpening. When Hannibal did not respond, the older woman smiled warmly.

"Ever the perfect gentleman, never one to kiss and tell. You are a respectable man, Hannibal," She reached up to pat his cheek with great affection a mother would have for her child.

"Now, I must find my husband. He would be so lost without me here to guide him, that poor dear," Mrs. Komeda held out her hand for Hannibal to bid her a good evening as she disappeared into the small crowd of the guests who gathered in the living room. They surrounded the grandfather clock, watching the golden pendulum swing back and forth as the clock approached midnight.

Instead of joining the crowd, Hannibal slipped away. The sound of the crowd of guests counting down the new year grew louder, drifting from the living room and into the foyer where Hannibal stood, alone. He stared down into his glass of champagne, untouched and still full. He watched as the bubbles fizzed from the bottom, fighting their way back to the top where they finally popped, returning to the air, where they rightfully belonged.

A tear dropped from the corner of his eye, dripping into the golden liquid with a plop. Another soon followed.

His guests continued to count the last few seconds of the year away.

"Three, two, one! Happy New Year!" Hannibal looked up through his brow, peeking into the living room. He looked on, a woman with a familiar black bob grasping her husband in a tender embrace, their arms wrapped around each other as their lips met like it was their sole purpose of existence.

Hannibal brought the champagne flute to his lips. His eyes blinked closed as his lips met the glass warmed by his grip. He let himself fall into the depths of his mind, for if he sunk far enough below the surface, as he drowned he would begin to taste the faint odor of cigarette smoke.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for getting this far and for your engagement!

Drop a comment! How are you feeling? I know I made myself emotional...

Until next time!

The True Prophet / Losin' My Religion

Chapter Notes

Hello! Thank you so much for your patience!

Apologies for the late chapter again! Midterm season has arrived and I accidentally ended up staging a coup and now I'm the president of a student organization.

I also had a really difficult time with this chapter. I rewrote it a couple times and ended up refining the outline again. That being said, the end is in sight! I'm so sad that it's ending, which is also probably why this gave me a rough time.

TW: For possible suicide themes and the ocean in general

See the end of the chapter for more notes

September 3rd, 2005

"Here's Brennan Sturm to give us the weather update. Brennan?"

"Thanks, Irene. Katrina, a Category 5 hurricane, has now become a tropical depression as it creeps up East, but not without doing some incredible damage first. Louisiana was hit especially hard, which has led to significant and dangerous flooding. We've received reports that 80% of the greater New Orleans area is submerged. Many have already begun to call this the costliest natural disaster in the history of the United States, having devastated the coasts of Mississippi and Alabama as we–"

The radio cut out with a blip, lithe fingers switching it off. Hannibal's lip was red when he set it free from his teeth, his eyes grim. He did not need to listen to the casualties from Louisiana. He stood from his chair and pushed it in neatly under his desk. Gathering his belongings, he locked up his office and walked out the front door.

Baltimore was enveloped in a deluge, fat raindrops hitting the pavement with vigor. The symphony of the storm was interrupted by the sound of a door opening, followed by the slower pitter-patter of footfall. The slosh of water sounded with each heavy step as Hannibal exited the building and onto the waterlogged patio, letting the dark of night wrap itself around him, the cacophony of rain splattering on the pavement, the sound stuffing itself into Hannibal's ears.

Thunder roared in the sky above him, lightning soon following in a crack that split open the sky in a silver thread that frayed at the edges. He adjusted his umbrella over his shoulder, the wind knocking it around as it greeted him, whipping loudly in his ears. He tightened his grip and stepped across the patio, his dress shoes clicking against the slate that hadn't flooded yet.

He stared at the water as it poured from the sky, the cloud like the shell from which the holy water pours. He watched with glassy eyes, the aroma of cleansed earth merging with his blood as he

breathed it in. He did not close his eyes. He did not retreat into his mind in fear he would not return. Instead, he observed the rain and finally decided to close his umbrella and set it down, leaning against the door. He turned to the side of the building, his hand reaching into his pocket, and procured something tucked in the palm of his hand. It glinted as the lightning dashed across the sky once again.

He reached into his office building's mailbox. Unlocking the box with his key, he flipped open the top of it, reaching inside. He pulled out envelopes from insurance companies and patients and such, holding them between his thin fingers. He set them in his other hand while he continued to dig through. His knuckles bumped into a thick booklet wrapped in plastic. He pulled it out carefully.

His eyes shone with a bright sparkle as the color orange reached his eyes. Large, white font stretched across the cover. *The American Journal of Forensic Medicine and Pathology* . He ripped open the plastic with a quickened breath, his heart rate picking up just by a beat. He pulled the journal out from the packaging immediately, his other mail tucked into the fold of his elbow.

He flipped open the cover, looking immediately at the table of contents.

He dropped his other mail, the envelopes falling to his feet. They began to wet from the small puddles of rainwater. Hannibal's breath stopped, stuck in his lungs, the stale air burning them. His fingers delicately traced each drop of ink that outlined the author's name, in skinny, small font underneath the boldness of the title.

He flipped to the given pages, his fingers trembling as he continued to hold his breath, like a God who did not need to breathe, only choosing to. The burn in his chest worsened. He stopped flipping through, and his breath finally released from his mouth, scorching hot against the back of his hands. His chest inflated in relief.

His eyes devoured the title page, the bright red almost glowing in the dark navy blue of the night. There was a bright flash of white racing across the sky.

Determining Time of Death Based on Insect Activity.

By Will Graham

He tore to the next page. A dedication sat in the middle of it, the only dark markings that dirtied the stark white of the paper.

Hannibal's breath hitched in his throat, his knees buckling underneath him. He fell down, plopping down into his porch seat. The metal chains that it hung from rattled in the night accompanied by a clap of thunder crashing through the sky, rolling through the clouds.

Hannibal's lithe fingers touched every inch of the page, bringing it close to his face. He brought the glossy pages to his nose, inhaling deeply. He winced as the harsh smell invaded his nose.

He ran his nimble fingers along the ink of the printed text as if he would feel Will's touch as he traced the words of the dedication. He ran his fingers down the page, devouring every word. He tried again. He brought the pages to his nose, inhaling again and deeper. Fresh ink and the waxy coat of the paper. There was still not a whiff of smoke, sweat, or dog. He knew this, and still, he tried and was disappointed once again. Hannibal scanned over the pages, fingers touching every drop of dried ink. He reached the end, finding a photo of the author.

A drop of salty water fell down his cheek, rolling over the two small scars across his tanned skin. He brought his lips to the black and white photo, the familiar unruly curls slicked back atop his head. His jaw was set firm, clenching underneath the cropped beard that adorned his cheeks. Hannibal kissed the printed image of Will's cheek where the tension would coil.

The author's biography was left blank. Hannibal flipped back to the dedication, smiling down upon it.

To the true prophet who helped me discover the Renaissance.

He traced each letter, bringing the monograph close. Hannibal clutched the pages, his knuckles white as he held the book to his chest. He inhaled deeply, the new humidity cleansing his nose of the wretched smell of wax and plastic. It permeated his mouth, refreshingly cool.

He closed the book, his fingers bookmarking the page of the dedication and the author's photo. He pressed it into his chest as if it would burrow inside his skin and crawl in between his ribs if he pressed hard enough. He did not grab his umbrella and walked down the steps, his feet falling with a soft click against the stone. He walked out from under the awning.

The rain was cold, the drops heavy on his face. He looked up towards the sky, letting the fresh water stream down his face, washing it clean of his salty tears. He closed his eyes, his clothing quickly becoming soaked as he was pelted in the aftermath of a hurricane. His hair clung to his forehead and neck, the cold like a ghost breathing down his neck. The journal quickly began to soak through, the wet papers sticking to his fingers.

He removed his hand from the book, the freshly-inked pages having bled onto his fingers, gray with washed-out ink. He looked down at the page, the printed image of Will's face muddled. The pages began to stick to each other, the rain from the thunderstorm helping them merge together, more fragile than they once were, separated and dry.

Hannibal brought his finger coated in ink and rainwater to his parted lips. He placed his finger in his mouth, devouring the sour taste of printer ink. It did not taste like smoke, sweat, or dogs. He knew this, yet he sucked on his fingers, pressing them into the wet hot of his mouth.

Hannibal opened his eyes once again, the dark storm clouds obscuring the sky. The clouds illuminated before him. He watched the sky crack apart in silver strings. He raised his hand up towards the sky, reaching for the stars that he could not see. They would remain unseen as the stars continued to bask in all of their vapid, insignificant glory. Even so, he reached for them.

September 3rd, 2005

The summer heat of the North Carolina coast did not feel as humid as the many summers spent in the Louisiana bayou. The wind blew away the humidity, throwing Will's hair back, the long ends brushing against his neck as they tumbled around. The fabric hanging loose around his outstretched arm fluttered as they were blown back, the soft fabric flapping against his skin. He outstretched his fingers towards the sky, wordlessly tracing the stars that littered the sky where the navy blue of the

sky blended with shades of violet. The colors of the sky merged as the Milky Way emerged, making itself known to the microcosms of Earth.

His fingers touched the stars, but there was no moon.

His arm fell to his side like it belonged to a dead man. His neck remained painfully craned upwards, staring hopelessly at the sky. Soon, his gaze fell to the horizon, where the night sky kissed the ocean.

"You were right," the waves crashed into the shore. "The sky isn't pitch black. The ocean is. Whoever says otherwise is either a fool or a blind man."

In the moments when the wind died down, the air stuck to his skin. But the sand was cold and damp on his heels, chilling the space between his toes as he trudged through it. The dogs yipped as they ran around, splashing into the waves as they crashed into the shore, only to return back into the ocean. Will continued to walk forwards, the sand kicking up onto his legs. He continued forward, the wet sand now compressing under the weight of his feet.

The waves crashed against the sand again, Will's bare feet disappearing as the water engulfed them. He stopped for a moment, feeling the rough sand scrape over his feet as the water pulled back into the ocean, the current dragging the sand back into the water against its will, consuming it, the saltwater trapping the sand underneath its weight. Will took another step forward, following the ushering of the water. His feet began to sting. He let the current drag him in.

The water soaked his jeans, chilling his body. He continued deeper, his feet now numb as the frigid waters reached his waist.

"I'm going to find you," the wind carried his whisper onto the water as the tides pushed and pulled, beckoning Will to fully immerse himself into the surf, to completely give himself up to the current. "Because I thought I could love you. I'm not so sure now."

Will waded further in, his feet leaving the ocean floor as a wave came, lifting him up effortlessly in the swell of it. He continued to gaze at the ocean beyond, a darkness that so perfectly resembled the abyss of his mind.

A sharp bark brought his attention back to the shore, his head turning back to see the pale sand stand out in the darkness. His back turned to the ocean. His first mistake.

A wave roared in his ears for a moment before it crashed over him, the ocean swallowing him whole. He heard nothing but the muffled rushing of water. His nose and throat burned as salt water flooded him, rushing into his body violently. He let the thrashing waters consume him. His second mistake. He was not the ocean's to consume, but Hannibal's.

He twisted and turned in the water, thrown to and fro as he was caught in the never-ending quarrel of the undercurrents. He threw his limbs around, heavy as the ocean clung to his clothes, weighing him down. Still, he fought, his hands clawing to where he thought was down towards the silted sand of the ocean floor, the water rushing through his hair, up his nostrils, and ripping into his lungs. The salt burned his insides, like hot coals thrown down his throat as he was forced to swallow it. All while it threw him around, twisting and turning violently as the water ruined him.

His head finally breached the surface of the water, the air biting his wet skin. Bathed in salt, yet cleansed.

Air tinged with the taste of salt rushed down his throat, inflating his chest and pushing against the water that deigned to crush him. His arms broke the surface with a splash, throwing the water aside. The barking returned, now a chorus of yapping. Will threw his arms forward, pushing himself through the water as he bobbed back down in between the waves. His feet found the ground again, now numb. He threw himself through the water, not swimming but not quite walking. The barking and the stars twinkling above guided him toward the shore.

Wet fur brushed against his palm. Will looked down towards it, finding Winston in the water next to him, barking in his face. The smell of wet dogs was a welcome one. Will grabbed onto his wet coat, breathing heavily as he trudged through the water. Another wave shoved him as it slammed into his back, his sopping wet clothes protecting it from the sting of a slap. Still, he managed a huff of a laugh, a bitter smile playing at the corners of his lips.

"Chew me up and spit me out," Will wheezed and spat out some salty dribble, “You do a good impression of him.”

He and Winston continued to make their way out of the waters toward the others who continued to bark like a beacon. The frigid waters around Will's waist soon became shallower, wading out of the icy prison made easier. Will stumbled as a wave smacked into his back on his way out, catching himself with one hand, his hand plunging underwater. His fingers burrowed into the sand, steadying him as he almost fell.

Another round of thunder rumbled in the sky, the light interlude of drizzling growing heavier as the rain started to pour from the sky as blood did from the gaping wound of his stomach. Will lumbered towards the other dogs, ruffling their fur as he walked further up the shore towards the dunes.

Winston did not bark, shaking his coat out onto the other dogs who barked at him playfully.

Will grabbed his shoes from where they sat in the sand in front of the abandoned lifeguard deck. He caught a glimpse of the sign tacked to the wooden structure.

MANDATORY EVACUATION IS IN EFFECT.

The best action to protect yourself and your family from the flooding and high winds caused by hurricanes is to evacuate when ordered to do so, before those conditions hit your area. Know and follow the directions from local officials for community evacuation and follow posted evacuation routes.

Will sighed heavily, bending down to grab his phone from the inside of his discarded shoe. He flipped it open, the screen blinking to life. There was one unread message.

(800) 555-3030

It's been published! Congratulations! We still need an address on file to send you your advanced copy.

Will turned off the phone and pried it open. He removed the sim card and brought it to his mouth. He bit down on it, snapping it in half in his mouth. He spat it into the sand and kicked more over it, burying it under the lifeguard stand. Will walked back over to the shore, letting the water that washed up re-numb his feet that had just begun to warm back up.

He winded his arm back behind him and then threw his arm forward, his entire body twisting like a Greek discus player in the heavy rain and the howling wind. Will chucked the phone into the ocean, the small black thing plopping into the ocean.

The sand crumbled underneath his foot as he turned his heel. Will watched a streak of lightning break open the sky from afar, illuminating the clouds in a warm flash of yellows and oranges. Like flames licking at the steel gray clouds. Will whistled sharply, the dogs running after him, Sasha the slowest. She did not run, dragging her feet in the sand.

He turned to the steps that led back up onto the boardwalk. He began to climb the old, wooden steps that bent and creaked under the weight of him. He climbed over the sand dunes, the dogs pattering up the steps behind him. He knocked his shoes together, ridding the sand from them.

There was a shower in the small gazebo at the top of the stairs. He began to strip the soaking wet clothes off of his form, peeling them off as he would someone's skin. Will threw his clothes to the floor, a thin layer of sand coating his entire body from his tumble.

He turned on the shower head, washing the grains of sand off of his body in minutes. The dogs followed after him as he walked back to his car, barefoot. His wet footprints disappeared as the rain began to pick up, wetting the black asphalt that was warm against his chilled feet.

He opened the door, the dogs piling in without question, Winston waited a moment, shaking the salt water out of his fur. While the dogs took care of themselves, Will opened the back of the truck. He grabbed a small duffel bag that was pressed up against the other contents of his truck, and packed to the brim with fishing supplies, two suitcases, his toolbox, and the cooler.

He zipped open the duffel bag with shaking hands. His body was numb with cold, his fingers pale yellow. He grabbed a fresh pair of clothes and shut the truck door. He rounded the car, throwing on the sweatpants and shirt as he got to the door. He hauled himself into the car and turned it on immediately, reaching for the heat. The radio burst to life with the car engine.

" *That's me in the corner. That's me in the spotlight. Losin' my religion, tryin' to keep up with you. And I don't know if I can do it. Oh no, I've said too much, I haven't said enough,"*

With a flick of his fingers, Will changed the channel on the radio. He flipped through different channels playing various types of music he didn't care for. He turned on his windshield wipers as rain fell against his windshield, the drizzle growing heavier with every second.

"We've received reports that 80% of the greater New Orleans area is submerged. Many have already begun to call this the costliest natural disaster in the history of the United States, having devastated the coasts of Mississippi and Alabama as well. Katrina will move up the East Coast, so expect heavy rain and potential flooding over the next few days. Back to you, Irene!"

“Thanks, Brennan! You’re listening to…”

Turning the wheel with one hand, Will reached over to the radio. With a simple tap of the nob, he shut it off. He chose to drive on in silence.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I hope you enjoyed! See you next time!

Bait / Bonsoir

Chapter Notes

Welcome back! It's great to have you!

Okay, I KNOW this is a short one. BUT the one after this? It will make up for the short chapters. This one is super super important. Will gets ballsy. Hannibal gets more dramatic.

LET'S GET TO IT!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

February 11, 2006

Even with the waders protecting his legs from getting wet, the cold water still chilled Will's legs as it rushed downstream. He reeled the fishing line back into his rod and wound it up behind his shoulder. It was a similar motion to wielding a hatchet. He threw a better cast, watching as the current tugged the bait back and forth in a tempting movement.

"Can I pet your dogs?"

Will turned to find a young kid on the edge of the rocks, carrying a fishing rod and a tackle box, a foldable chair slung over their shoulder. They wore a simple black shirt with white font scrawled across the front. His eyes flitted to the text as he avoided looking into the teenager's eyes.

"The worst day of fishing beats the best day of court mandated anger management," Will read aloud instead of responding. The kid grinned.

"It's my favorite shirt!" they exclaimed and set down the tackle box. With one hand holding his fishing rod, Will reached a hand into the breast pocket of his vest. While he grabbed his glasses from its case, Sasha jogged over to the kid, sniffing at their feet.

"Can I?" they asked again, their voice carrying out across the water. Will stared. He took a breath, but the words in his throat hesitated as he watched Sasha sniff excitedly and jump up on the kid, her docked tail wagging furiously. Will's face softened as he unclenched his jaw. Sasha hasn't been this happy since Hannibal left. He nodded silently.

The kid burst out laughing as they fell over Sasha, who reciprocated the excitement, wriggling in the hug. Sasha licked their face, getting slobber on the young teenager's own glasses. The kid giggled, Sasha rolling onto her back, her three legs raised in the air as she received belly rubs. Will wrenched his gaze away from the two fast friends, watching his lure bob in the water.

"Did you get any bites yet?" the kid asked from the shore, kneeling down as they pet Sasha. Will still did not respond, watching the blue of the water ripple in the wind. They tried to get his attention again, their voice louder this time.

"Have you seen Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles? It's the best show on television."

Will continued to watch the fishing lure that did not get pulled down. There was a splash, the current of the water disrupted. He looked over, his head turning slowly towards the shore. The young teenager waded through the water towards him, fishing rod in hand.

"What's got you down so bad?" the kid poked him in the shoulder with one single finger, jabbing it into the muscle of his upper arm.

"What's the haps, my guy?" they asked again, only to be met with a beat of silence. He continued to look ahead out at the water, ignoring the dull prodding at his arm.

"C'mon!" the kid persisted, "Nobody's sad when they're fishing. What's going on?"

"I lost the best catch of my life." Will's voice was quiet, the lapping of the water at their legs almost drowning him out.

"You're sulking because you lost a fish?"

"Sure," Will pressed his lips together, watching the water glisten in the daylight.

"Are you just pouting about it?" The kid fiddled with their fish hook, piercing something onto it. "Maybe you just need to use some new bait." Will turned to look at the young kid beside him, his dark blue eyes lightening with a gleam.

"New bait," Will repeated, his voice quiet under his breath. The kid beamed, holding up their fish hook to show him.

"Yep! I use hot dogs. It's good for catching catfish," They cast their line with practiced ease. Will chortled, a smile breaking out across his face.

"Very creative," he said as he clapped a hand on the kid's back. "I like your shirt. It's accurate."

The young teenager grinned up at him, their teeth shining in the sunlight.

"Thanks, man!" The two fished side by side the rest of the afternoon, only packing up to leave as the sun began to set over the water, taking their separate ways.

Will left the equipment in the back of the truck when he arrived back at the cabin. He let the dogs run in before he could. Will sat down at the dining room table. Opposite him at the other place setting was the cooler. He poured the last of the whiskey from the bottle into a glass. He threw it back in one shot, not caring to nurse it. Slumping back into the chair, he looked down, his hair creating shadows around his eyes. He tapped the glass against the arm of the chair, his feet still as if they were glued to the wooden floor.

The tapping ceased, his grip tightening in his fist. The glass shattered in his grip, leaving shallow cuts in his hand as it fell to the ground. Drops of whiskey painted his hand, the amber liquid sticky in his palm. He huffed in annoyance, but did not move to clean it up. He looked down at the shards by his feet.

He pushed himself out of the chair. He sauntered down the hallway of the cabin, pulling a key out of his pocket. He unlocked the door and opened it to a pitch black room. He flipped on the light, revealing a simple bed and a chair. He sat down on the bed and lifted the pillow, revealing an

envelope underneath. The flap had been opened, upright in the air. He took it into the hand that had not been cut up. He carefully removed the paper from inside.

Will unfolded the paper, rereading the elegant cursive of Hannibal's hand. Still, it did not bring comfort. Nothing compared to the real thing.

"I need better bait," he said aloud as he slid the letter back into the envelope. He tucked it into his breast pocket and stood. He grabbed his few clothes hanging in the closet and stuffed them into his duffle bag. He switched off the light as he returned to the main room. He let the TV continue to run, looking at the dogs who slept peacefully before it. He grabbed the remote and increased the volume until he was certain the occupants of the neighboring cabin could hear it. He swiped a piece of glass from the floor, but swapped it for another after inspecting the first. Satisfied with his choice, he grabbed the keys to the cabin.

Will left the cabin and locked the door behind him. He walked past his car, ignoring it as he set out on foot into the night. A movement caught his eye in the dark. A glimpse of curly hair. A bubbly laugh. Wrong place, wrong time. Will continued forward, his footsteps silent as he surged towards the person with a shard of glass pressed into his palm.

February 12, 2006

As the sun ascended over the horizon, she began to clothe the land, weaving a garment from the threads of light that spun from her being. The fabric danced across the lapping waters of the Chesapeake as she wove. She climbed higher into the sky, her rays began to reach farther across the water, dressing the bay in a slow warmth until she reached the shore.

Brittled driftwood sat atop the sun-bleached rocks, caked in dried silt, powdery to the touch. The remnants of dead, parched moss clung on, stringy and gray. Entire fish skeletons were strewn around, the skin of the carcasses baked under the light that destroys some while nourishing others. Weeds pushed through the cracks in the rocks, begging for a chance to survive.

A pile of deep maroon flowers were placed atop the white rock, like bone bathed in blood. The silhouette of a human figure knelt upon the flowers, red knees pressed into the cushion of petals. Its arms were outstretched towards the trickling water, something pale and fabric-like draped over their hands in an offering. In the soft shadowed light, dark curls sat atop their head, pulled upright with a fishing line. The sun glinted in the lens of the glasses perched on the bridge of their nose.

As the sun crept into the sky, she did not clothe the land like she did the bay. The morning light uncovered the corpse who had no skin.

Their body was flayed, revealing the intricacies of raw muscle and tendons as they were pulled taut over bone. They twisted and turned, winding and braiding together like thick, strong ropes.

Draped over their bare arms and outstretched towards the water was the heap of their pale skin.

THE ROUGAROU TRAVELS NORTH

02/13/2006

By Freddie Lounds

Early yesterday morning, a victim of a gruesome murder was found on the beach of Fisherman's Island in Virginia, a National Wildlife Refuge on the banks of the Chesapeake River. Only 3 years ago in a Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge, a serial killer named the Baton Rouge Rougarou rampaged through the area.

The Baton Rouge police department stopped investigating the case after police Captain Cassandra Poirier was killed by the Rougarou. Due to the possible reemergence of the Rougarou, the FBI has recently taken over the investigation, with the recently appointed head of the Behavioral Analysis Unit at Quantico, Special Agent Jack Crawford leading the hunt.

The victim found on Fisherman's Island has yet to be identified, as their body was found skinned, holding their own skin in their hands (Figure A.1). Not only does this level of horrific violence compare to how the deceased Captain Poirier was found (Figure B.1), but the victim was also found kneeling in a pile of flowers. What kind of flowers, you ask? The flowers have been identified as Sweet Williams flowers, the same type of flower stuffed into the empty cavity of Poirier's eye sockets, mouth, and skull and scattered around her (Figure B.2)

The FBI has yet to give a statement, when in fact it is clear that this is most likely the Baton Rouge Rougarou who has decided to travel further north. Due to the FBI, particularly Jack Crawford's slow to act leadership surrounding this case, the Rougarou has become emboldened to begin killing this way again. Who knows how many more innocent people were killed and flew under the radar?

Now, the Rougarou is becoming a national problem. Will we be able to trust the FBI to help keep us safe? The jury is still out on that, dear readers.

More to come from yours truly, TattleCrime.

Hannibal stared at the tabloid that sat in front of him. His breath was caught in his throat, his hands hovering over the image of the body. A shiver ran down his spine, his shoulders twitching at the sight. His breath released from his lungs. It was shaky.

He swallowed, but his mouth was dry. He gripped the edges of the tabloid in his palms, leaning over the desk. His dark blonde bangs fell forward, limiting his line of sight. All he could see was the grainy tabloid picture of the body, taken from far away. In the corners he could make out the edges of crime scene tape roping off the scene.

He touched the skinned arms of the corpse, its outstretched holding the discarded pelt of human skin. His finger migrated to the red blob in the picture, the flowers from far away resembling a maroon carpet. Or a perfectly round puddle of blood.

Hannibal stood up abruptly from his chair as the message became clear.

I surrender my person suit. So, you must too.

Icy, pale legs hung in the air, contrasting the deep red silks that wrapped around the back of one knee and then to the other, from her thin ankle up to her thigh. Her back hung loosely, the aerial silks tucked in her hands and knotted around her wrists. Her hair hung to frame her face, but it did not fall over her eyes. Something else blinded her. Fresh gauze wrapped around her head, obscuring her eyes from view.

Her mouth hung open in anguish. Her jaw was broken, her mouth having been pried open like a clam-shell. Her chest matched her mouth. The flesh of her breast was torn open to the sides. Her ribs had been split and ripped away from her chest cavity. They splayed out from her sides, like wings mid-flight. Her body was suspended in the air, swaying every so slightly in the gentle ventilation of the room. She faced the empty seats of the theater.

Erected on the stage below her was a polished, marble pillar, fluted all around its circumference. Sat atop of it was a silver platter, reflecting the spotlight that illuminated the pallid skin of the woman hanging in the air. On the plate, sitting in a pool of her own blood was the heart, no longer beating in the woman's chest. The dark crimson contrasted the shining silver. A single, maroon flower sat before the freed heart, the dark blood seeping into the petals.

The scratch of a record filled the silence of the room as a gloved hand gently placed the needle atop it. He began to walk away as it began to spin, his footsteps loud as they clicked against the floor. Not quite a thud, but the rich sound of solid soles of dress shoes hitting the ground with vigor and grace. As he descended the steps to the stage, the sound slowly faded into the ambiance of the room, overtaken by the folly of the violins.

A string orchestra accompanied a violin’s high pitched wail, the other instruments growing frantic as the solo went on. The grand doors of the theater slammed shut as a man's voice began to sing, "Roxanne, why does my heart cry? Feelings I can't fight!”

It skipped, the orchestra’s frenzied music repeating as it led once more to the man’s endless cry, “Roxanne, why does my heart cry? Feelings I can't fight!"

The record skipped back again, reliving the frenzy of the string instruments. The man's repeating the couplet throughout the entire night. The woman hanging from the ceiling listened to the man’s tragic lament that echoed throughout the theater. As it echoed, the woman was forced to perform to the same twitchy music for an empty audience. She was freed from her endless encore when one Jack Crawford pulled the needle off of the track that morning. For a moment, she hung peacefully from the silks, before the FBI would disturb her once more as they re-traumatized her body for their investigation.

If she could see what more was to come, she would have wept. Instead, she enjoyed the bliss of her blind peace.

February 14, 2006

The pencil scraping against the white paper canvas was interrupted by a scratching at the waiting room door. Hannibal set the pencil gently atop his desk, straightening it so it was parallel to the edge of the paper. His fingers brushed over the cold metal of the scalpel beside him. He palmed it carefully as he stood in one elegant, swift movement.

The metal was freezing against his rough palm. Hannibal buttoned his suit jacket with one hand, his dress shoes clicking as they hit the freshly polished, hardwood floors. He approached the waiting room door in only a few long strides.

He stopped in front of the closed door.

The scratching continued, claws scraping against the heavy dark wood. Hannibal unlocked the door and opened it, only after making sure his person suit had been properly stitched up, not a loose stitch to be had. He met the other side with a practiced smile on his face, as gentle as ever. No one was there.

He looked down and was met with familiar black and brown fur. Sasha wagged her docked tail, panting in such a way that resembled a smile. Her tongue hung out the side of her mouth, her eyes wide and round, her entire body wiggled in excitement.

"WOOF!" She barked at Hannibal, who stood there, with teary eyes. As he reached down to pet her, a sharp whistle sounded. Her ears perked backwards. With a bit of hesitation, Sasha got up and scampered into the shadows of the waiting room. Hannibal inhaled deeply, stale cigarette smoke burned his nostrils. Still, a smile took over the corners of his lips.

"Bonsoir," he greeted the shadows from the doorway. A bearded man with unruly brown curls emerged from the dark of the room. His eyes were dark like the ocean. His lips parted, a thick Cajun drawl rolling off of his tongue.

"Bonsoir, Monsieur,"

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the interactions! They always make my day!

See you next time!

Dianthus Barbatus

Chapter Notes

Happy Halloween! Here's my contribution to kinktober! Lol jk jk, I wanted to give this chapter to you all early.

I'm not going to start crying (I hope) because here is the finale. No tears because there will be an epilogue.

Still, before we get into it, I want to express my gratitude to you all. This has been a WILD RIDE. I've never written anything like this before. I couldn't be prouder with how it's turned out. I am so grateful and touched by your interactions, whether its reading the fic or leaving comments, I adore every single one of you.

I want to express my biggest thanks to The_Grey_Lady_Weeps! She has been a godsend to me, helping me edit these last couple chapters. I urge you to check out her Criminal Minds fic she has in progress! She is a phenomenal writer! And don't forget, artist! She did the fanart embedded in chapter 6!

As always, music has played a huge role in my inspirations. Check out the playlist I made for the fic in the end notes. I was thinking of making a companion work that would just explain why each song is on the playlist using textual evidence. For this chapter, I listened to Closer by Nine Inch Nails. A LOT.

With all that said... happy reading, my loves!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Please, come-"

"You sure are killin' it out here with this new fancy job of yours, Doc," Will interrupted as he prowled through the doorway. Their shoulders barely touched, yet electricity shot down their spines. They both refused to react to it.

"I have done well in this field. You were quite right. Even if you were quite rude in how you said it that morning,"

Hannibal shut the door after him. He flipped the lock. He turned and watched Will round his office.

"And yet, I'm not tonight's roast." Will tilted his head from his place behind Hannibal's desk with a smile that was akin to a shark baring its teeth. He made pointed eye contact with Hannibal, eyes narrowed and hidden under a furrowed brow.

"And yet, I've still tasted you," Hannibal quipped back, mirroring his speech patterns with a smirk.

Will slammed the small cooler down on the desk with a snarl. Hannibal glared at the condensation that dripped down the side and onto the rich mahogany. Will traced his fingers along the wet gloss

of the wood, the corners of his mouth twisted upwards in contempt.

Wiping the glare from his eyes, Hannibal walked to the corner of the room to grab a bottle of wine from the cabinet. He turned the 1991 Chianti in his hands, gazing upon the bottle's tan label and red wax seal.

"You have a liquor cabinet in your office," Will noted, leaning against the desk with a sharp look in his eyes. The blue was piercing in the dim light of the room, like the full moon in the dead of night. "What will your patients think, Doctor Lecter?" he teased, dragging a blunt nail over the desk. He pressed down hard, trying to leave a scratch. If it was skin, he would have left welts.

"But, how fortunate for you, Guillaume." Hannibal popped the wine bottle open. Will scoffed at the avoidance, earning a small pout from Hannibal. "Are you unimpressed? Unfazed by my affections?"

"Affections my ass." Will rolled his eyes so hard his head lolled backward.

"How fortunate that they know such a fine asset," Hannibal gestured an empty wine glass towards Will, who clicked his tongue in response.

"Still on a whiskey kick, Doctor," he drawled, taking a seat in the leather armchair. Hannibal concealed a disappointed grimace at the cold address. The space between them felt as large as an arctic lake, but they were both too hesitant to cross it and risk falling in. Hannibal handed Will a glass of the smoky amber liquid and took a seat across from him in his matching chair. Hannibal threw a leg over his knee. Will did the same.

They both took a sip. Their eyes did not leave each other's. Neither said a word.

As they stared at each other in silence, Hannibal dipped his finger into his wine glass, coating the tip in the deep red of the Chianti. Now wet, he brought it to the rim of the glass. He circled the rim in a steady rhythm, rubbing the thin edge of the crystal until a sharp ringing began to resonate.

"Opera singers have been known to shatter glass with the very power of their voice," he explained as the sound began to decay. He began the process again.

"A glass begins to sing when two opposing sides of it expand and contract simultaneously, all while contrary to the side just ninety degrees away. These rapid vibrations begin to affect the air inside of the glass, manipulating it to compress and expand. Molding it like clay, similar to how the goddess Aruru made Enkidu as a companion for Gilgamesh."

Hannibal stood and approached Will with a steady stride, his vibrating off of him in waves that would rival those of the glass. Will watched him with a raised chin.

He downed the rest of the whiskey and set down the cup beside him. He sat with his legs splayed out in front of him, a casual slouch that would only get worse as he would melt into it. He watched Hannibal approach with one eyebrow raised.

Will's breath hitched, his foot sliding against the floor as he tucked it back, his toes pressed against the hardwood floors. Hannibal did not stop when he reached Will, instead slipping past him.

The heavy clunk of his footsteps against the hardwood floor were directly behind Will when they ceased. Hannibal leaned forward, placing his arms around Will's shoulders. He placed the wine

glass in Will's hand and brought his wine-soaked fingertip to his lips.

"The glass' manipulation of the air it has entrapped is what produces sound." He spoke into his ear, the edge of Will's soft curls brushing his cheekbone.

Will pushed himself up from the chair and shoved his arms away as he broke away from Hannibal's grasp. The wine glass shattered as it hit the ground, and the office flooded with the ringing sound. Red wine flooded the hardwood floor, seeping into the cracks as it crawled forwards in all directions. Pieces of the shattered crystal glimmered, reflecting the dim lighting of the room. It sparkled with all the elegance it would have as if time had reversed and it had never even broken.

The two still looked at each other. Will's brow was furrowed, his eyes a darker shade of blue than when he arrived.

"Are you the glass, or am I?" Will challenged, staring back in defiance. Hannibal picked up a shard of crystal glass, running a finger across the jagged edge. He smiled as blood welled from the diagonal slash across the fleshy pad of his thumb. His eyes flitted up to find Will's. An impish grin hung from his lips.

"Has the voice of my soul shattered you?"

"Always with the goddamn metaphors." Will deflected, rubbing his mouth with his fingers. A rich silence sat between them.

"I read the monograph," Hannibal tried again, "and you dedicated it to me,"

"Sure did," Will said despondently, a burning sweetness in his tone. His shoulders started to tighten, standing behind the chair where Hannibal had been sitting before. They stood opposite of each other once more, having swapped places. Cat chasing mouse, mouse chasing cat. Will's hands gripped the plush leather of the chair back. It bent to his will.

"I understood it to be your message. A declaration of what you had chosen." Hannibal sidestepped the broken bottle and spilled wine, approaching Will slowly. "Who you had chosen."

Will lowered his head, averting his gaze. In response to Will's silence, Hannibal only continued as he took slow steps toward him.

"And yet, another year passed. And there was no sign of you. I thought you had died, my dear boy. I let myself live in a reality where you had never left Louisiana and were struck down by the storm. While storms create after they have struck down many, I am selfish. I want to take you. Hide you away so the most natural forces of the world cannot take you. I shall be the only one who can. I am a selfish man, William. I do not pretend I am not."

Will glanced back up, his mouth open but words stuck in his throat. He met Hannibal's gaze with an ache in his eyes. He surged forwards, pulling him into an embrace with his fists clenching the soft fabric of Hannibal's sweater. Will pressed his chest flush against Hannibal's, who stood there in delighted shock, but nudged his head against Will's as he too pulled him closer. Will's head fell atop Hannibal's shoulder, his breath blowing warm on Hannibal's neck. Will stared at the unblemished skin. He licked the inside of his mouth at the sight.

Will adjusted his grip, wrapping one arm around his waist and the other around the back of his head, pulling at it so he looked down, his nose pressed into his shoulder. Will stepped forward to

bring them closer, his foot in-between Hannibal's. He pressed himself forward, pressing his thigh lightly into Hannibal's groin. His nose nudged Hannibal's earlobe as he brought his mouth to it. His lips tightened at the corners as a single word dripped from them like velvet.

"Bullshit."

Will grabbed the back of Hannibal's neck and dug his fingernails into the flesh made soft by the peach fuzz under his hairline. Hannibal's breath hitched as if blizzard winds whipped in his ears. His cold words froze him to the bone, the hypothermia more painful than the sting of claws making a home in the meat of his neck.

Will pushed Hannibal away. They stumbled backward, having been ripped apart. Together, they tore open the sutures that stitched them together. Blood painted the whites of Will's nails red, his hand slowly falling back to his side. The two stared at each other from opposite ends of the lake, neither one daring to cross. Will's fingers tucked into tight fists, nails bruising against his palms.

"You broke my heart before I could even tell you I loved you. You could write me an entire letter flaunting your precious flower language, but you couldn't tell me you were *fucking* sorry?" Thin streams of warm blood trickled down Hannibal's neck, slowly rolling down towards the collar of the dress shirt underneath his sweater. Despite his best interest, he took another step forward toward the young man who continued to hurt him just as much as he hurt him. His tongue was thick in his throat as if he would swallow it and never be able to speak again. His vocal folds refused to vibrate and his lungs forbade air to leave them.

Hannibal's words were ripped away from him with the same ease he had ripping out a woman's kidney for dinner.

Will scoffed at his silence, or maybe at his persistence. One could never be sure with them. Hannibal continued to approach, reeled back in by the very storm that threw him adrift.

"The good Doctor, rendered speechless. Maybe we should take a look into that mind of yours." Will surged forward, meeting Hannibal halfway. Hannibal grabbed will by the jaw, forcing their eyes to meet. Will grunted at the cold grip and the dull pain as Hannibal squeezed his jaw. "I'm not a psychiatrist, but I've been told I've got a great imagination," Will spit out, saliva thick on his tongue and a growl in his throat. "Like mirrors for a brain."

"I present you my humility, a rare gift only found in the vivisection of my very being."

"Loving you is like trying to catch air," Will hissed back. "Senseless and idiotic."

"If I am not a selfish man, then what do you say I am?"

"You are selfish. But that's not the reason why you left."

Hannibal's eyes narrowed just a fraction.

"I am utterly enraptured, yet equally plagued with apprehension," Will recited, each word rolling off of the tongue as if he had been the man to write it. Although the silence returned, the two were conjoined in their shared understanding.

"You are afraid. You always have been," Will whispered, his voice dangerous, like the shaking of a rattlesnake's tail.

"Is it such a bad thing to be afraid of one's emotions? I ache to consume you or be consumed by you. I am afflicted by a longing to rip out your heart and replace it with myself. "

"'Plagued'. 'Afflicted'," Will mocked. "Having fear requires an unknown. A rogue variable in your equations. A wildcard that cannot be anticipated nor understood. Even by the brightest of minds. The unknown is a disease that needs to be managed." Will swallowed thickly, "I'm a disease to you." His fingers wrapped around Hannibal's wrist attached to the hand that still held his jaw. But it had loosened. Hannibal's eyes were bright with emotions that pounded on the walls of his mind, begging to be let free from their fortified palace.

"I love you, Sweet William. Can't you see that is what drives me?" he pleaded, each word layered in his accent, thicker than pudding.

"You don't love me." Will declared, whispering a silent song of betrayal, "You just want to control me. It's always been about control for you." Hannibal let go of Will's chin, his hand twisting to grab at Will's hand holding his wrist as it fell. He pried open Will's fist, something glinting in his other hand,

"Then let me give up my control to you, my dear boy." Hannibal pressed a scalpel into Will's palm. He closed his fingers around the metal, still warm from its rightful place, tucked away in Hannibal's sleeve. The turbulent blue of the waves hissed as they crashed into the blistering red of the volcano, evaporating as they touched. But the tide continued to return.

Hannibal took Will's palm and guided it toward his abdomen. His calloused hands brushed against the blue cashmere. Hannibal pushed it into the fabric, making him slide it upwards, revealing his torso, marred with the scar of a bullet wound.

"I should have marked you, as you did to me." They looked down at Will's steady hands as he pierced the thick wall of scar tissue. Will twisted the scalpel to the side, the tip of the blade slipping in deeper and deeper. He exhaled shakily as he watched the steel disfigure the scar. Hannibal did not flinch, but a single pearl of sweat dripped down his temple.

"Is this arousing to you?" Hannibal managed to hiss out through clenched teeth.

He grabbed Will's wrist, both looking up to meet each other's gaze.

"You asking me?" Will snarked.

Hannibal let out a moan as the silver of the scalpel pressed into the sensitive scar tissue on his stomach. A single stream of red poured out as the point stabbed him.

"I will carve a place for me inside of you,"

"You already have, dear boy," Hannibal panted, sweat beading on his forehead. Will brushed Hannibal's wet bangs aside with a tranquil smile. Hannibal trembled in anticipation.

Will plunged the scalpel into his abdomen, pressing further, cutting through the layers of muscle. He obliterated the scar, slicing it away and letting warm red pour over his skin. Baptized in blood.

Will did not yank the scalpel, but pulled it out slowly with a steady hand. Hannibal moaned as the sharpened edge dragged agonizingly slowly against his raw skin, slipping from the blood that lubricated it.

"What's become of you, Doctor Lecter? Losing your composure so easily for me? Have you finally taken down the boards from your eyes?"

Will shoved the handle of the scalpel back into Hannibal's hand.

"Hold this for me, will ya? I appreciate you lettin' me borrow it," his teased, his drawl thick and heavy. "But I'm better with my hands,"

Will plunged his finger and thumb into the fresh wound, eliciting a cry from Hannibal somewhere between a moan and a grunt. The hole in his abdomen squelched as Will twisted his fingers around. Will grit his teeth, cursing as the blood leaked down his hand. Hannibal grabbed at Will's shirt, the seams ripping as he pulled.

Will pulled his hand out from the mutilated incision, his emerging fingers dressed up in red. Held in between them was a small piece of copper coated in blood and tissue, its edges peeled back like a blooming flower. Will gazed at the bullet he held, a single drop of blood dripping from one of its petals. Will dropped it with a smirk.

He looked to Hannibal, whose chest heaved as he leaned his weight into Will. He barely stood on his own, his mouth agape as he greedily consumed the air around him. Still, there was a lively glint in the maroon abysses of his illuminated eyes.

"I did not think I would taste my blood in the air again. But, if I am to bleed for you, I will give my best performance."

Will caressed Hannibal's cheek with a bloody hand, sitting him down in his chair. Hannibal watched Will walk away. He watched with half-lidded eyes as Will grabbed a bottle of vodka from his liquor cabinet. He blinked once and Will drifted back in front of him, like the fogginess of a dream.

Will twisted open the bottle and outstretched his arm. He poured the contents out over Hannibal's bloody stomach. Hannibal hissed, his hands squeezing the arms of the chair. Will did not flinch at his winces and flicks of the tongue at his lips.

He instead watched the pink pool of blood and alcohol streaming down his pale skin and pooling on either side of him on the leather chair. Will tipped the bottle further until the last drops fell from the lip. Will tossed it with abandon, smiling at the twitchy snarl forming on Hannibal's lips as he made an even greater mess of his office.

Will straddled his lap and plopped down, pressing his hand to Hannibal's now disinfected wound. Hannibal brought his hand next to Will's. He gingerly dipped his fingers into the bloody mess of his own abdomen and touched them to his mouth, pushing them past his lips. Will accepted, sucking the blood and vodka off of Hannibal's fingers.

"You would make a lovely pudding, darlin'."

"Sanguinaccio Dolce, my Sweet William," He corrected with a twisted smile. Will grabbed his smirking face roughly and pulled him into a toothy kiss, leaving a bloody handprint on his cheek.

Will writhed through their embrace as he ground his hips into Hannibal’s lap. The blood dripping from Hannibal’s reopened wound was camouflaged as it seeped into the red plaid of Will’s flannel.

Hannibal groaned as Will grabbed at his face and hair, smearing blood in the dark blond strands, ruining the gel that held it in place. His arm flew around Will's waist and his other hand grabbed at Will's throat. Hannibal squeezed tightly, the knuckles of his palm pressing into the tough cartilage of his trachea. Will broke their gnashing, toothy kiss with his gasping for air, breath wheezing out of bloody lips.

Hannibal's eyes darkened as he watched Will squirm atop of him, his head thrown back to reveal more of his throat, a pillar of marble kissed by the southern sun. His back arched away from Hannibal, but he leaned closer to him, his body conflicted between the desires to flee and to remain.

Hannibal released his throat from his vice grip when his lashes began to flutter. Will plunged forward, driving his clothed hips into Hannibal's bare torso, pressing them closer than before. Will's erection tented his jeans, bloodied as it pressed against Hannibal's gaping hole of a wound.

"Hannibal," Will gasped as Hannibal ran a hand through his tangled locks.

He yanked Will's neck to the side, the unraveling man elbowing Hannibal in the chest in their struggle for control. Hannibal brought his nose to Will's neck, inhaling deeply while admiring the red handprint he had left on his throat. There was no doubt it would be bruised tomorrow. He contemplated the smell.

"The Chesapeake Bay," Hannibal concluded, but Will pushed back, elbowing him harder in the chest and knocking Hannibal backward with enough force to make his skin strike the leather of the chair.

"What else do you smell?" Will growled, twisting the fabric of Hannibal's sweater in his fist. Blood stained the cashmere as he pushed it higher. Will ran his fingers over the dusting of hairs on Hannibal's unveiled chest, scratching his fingernails across his skin, leaving deep red welts trailing in their wake. Hannibal shuddered through his inhale, breath hitching as Will curled his fingers into the sopping wound again.

"Go on, tell me," Will goaded, sliding off of Hannibal's lap and kneeling before him. He ran his hand up Hannibal's pant leg while he hooked his fingers into the wet, mutilated flesh. When his hand began to slip from the slick blood, he dug his nails into it like an anchor in the sand. Hannibal made music with his guttural moans.

"The sweat of your lust dancing with the smell of vodka and my blood," Hannibal grunted through grit teeth, watching Will from where he now knelt in front of Hannibal. Will looked up at Hannibal through his thick, black lashes, the blue shining through in the dim of the evening.

"Very good." Will praised. He leaned forward, his hand skirting up his leg, purposefully skipping over the visible erection straining in his slacks. Will grasped Hannibal's wound instead, this time with both hands, fingers prying him further open. They breathed heavily in unison as they watched each other, waiting for someone to crash through the ice and finally plunge into the glacial waters of the lake.

Will lunged forward, kneeling in worship as his mouth slammed into Hannibal's open wound, lapping up the blood and vodka that leaked down his sides. Hannibal threw his head back, striking it against the chair as he sank lower and lower, down into the clutches of the Rougarou. Hannibal's jaw fell open as he breathed through the excruciating pleasure assaulting him, his hands burying themselves in the brown curls he held so dear.

Will pressed himself further into Hannibal as he exalted him, chest shoved up against his jerking knees. He suckled at the fluids seeping from Hannibal's skin as if he was the fountain of eternal youth. Hannibal's breathing became sharp as he held back the sounds that left his throat so abruptly. His pulls at Will's scalp became rougher. Will released himself from the oasis of blood, his mouth dripping with a wine richer than what was in any bottle. With one meeting of their eyes, Hannibal pushed himself up, holding himself up with his trembling legs so Will could rip them off with one violent tug.

Will threw Hannibal's slacks and underwear behind him with abandon, neither caring to notice when they landed in the spilled wine and broken glass. Having enough thought to tuck his red lips over his teeth, Will swallowed down Hannibal's straining cock into the warm and dripping cavern of his mouth. He ran his tongue over the foreskin, sliding it up and down. He could feel his heartbeat pulsing against the dextrous muscle. He released him from his lips with a pop. He watched with shining blue eyes as it bobbed, pinkened with the man's own blood. He reached up with his fingers, playing with Hannibal's foreskin and watching as clear fluid began to leak from the head. He swiped one over the wet tip, pulling a moan from Hannibal's lips. Will looked up at him with a toothy smile and ran his hand down the shaft, coating it in precum.

Hannibal shifted his hips in the chair restlessly, yanking Will by the hairs on the nape of his neck, forcing a breath to escape him. Will licked his reddened lips and brought them back down, brushing them along the insides of his thighs. He did not kiss them. Hannibal's hips bucked once. Immediately, Will seized Hannibal by the hip in a bruising grasp. He bit down on his thigh, earning a hiss from Hannibal.

"Now, now, Doctor Lecter," Will attempted to tut, but his voice was too breathy. "This better have been worth the wait."

He climbed off of the floor, barely shedding his pants before seating himself on Hannibal's lap once more. Skin against skin. Will licked the palm of his hand slowly, their eyes locked in combat. He grabbed Hannibal’s thick cock in his palm, gripping his fingers over it. He stroked him roughly, leading Hannibal's hands to his mouth. Will sucked on Hannibal's fingers with hooded eyes, slicking them up and playing with them with his tongue. Hannibal lurched forward, sinking his teeth into his neck. Will's grip on Hannibal's cock faltered. His fingers fell loose in his mouth and his hand from Hannibal's wrist. When he pulled back, Will's blood coated his teeth.

Hannibal pulled his fingers from Will's mouth slowly, watching his tongue attempt to follow and the string of saliva stretch before breaking. Droop fell down the corner of Will's mouth, his eyes shaded by the rain clouds that had blown in. A thunderstorm was brewing.

Hannibal smiled at the drugged look on Will's face, dazed with pleasure. He knew his face was the same.

His hands slid to Will's ass, spreading his cheeks to find his puckered hole with his spit-slick fingers. He pushed one in, his brow furrowed as he watched Will's face erupt in pleasure, his eyes rolling upwards. He grabbed the arm attached to the hand under him. Inside him.

Will dragged his eyes down from the ceiling, the blue-gray storm clouds finding the bubbling lava of the volcano. The boards walling the broken windows had been demolished. The mirrors pointed inwards. Will mimicked Hannibal's expression, his eyes looking through him. His grip on his bicep tightened.

"Desecrate me," Will ordered, his voice ringing into the room. But if his command was church bells, Hannibal's response was the ringing of a sword unsheathed.

"Once I do, something new and beautiful will emerge," Hannibal cautioned. Will simply smiled. It was more brilliant than the full moon.

"I know,"

"Then it's a favor I shall gladly return." Hannibal shoved two more fingers into him without warning. Will toppled over him, his heart rabbiting in his chest as the burn overcame him. Pleasured him. Will keened as he was stretched open roughly by Hannibal's dexterous fingers. They scissored and flexed inside of him, loosening him up with no more than spit and residual blood. He pushed in deeper, rubbing up against his insides.

Will squirmed in his lap, his gasps becoming short and brief as Hannibal explored him. He pulled his hand off of Hannibal's throbbing cock and reached in between his own legs, reaching for the smooth skin in between his own stiff cock and his ass. The blissful spot Hannibal had shown him three years ago. His pink cock slapped against his stomach as he began to bounce and push backward on Hannibal's fingers, yearning for them to sink deeper.

Hannibal removed his fingers in one swift motion. The whimper pouring from Will's lips went straight to his cock. He swallowed thickly and grabbed Will by the hips, tugging him forward. Understanding without a word, Will batted Hannibal's hands away, climbing forward to straddle him better. His thighs quivered as he hovered over Hannibal's cock. He threw his head back and took his lip in between his teeth as the wet head pressed against his gaping entrance. Hannibal grabbed at Will, holding his face by his neck, his beard tickling the inside of his wrist. Will let his head be pulled forward. They fell into each other, resting their heads against each other's forehead.

Will pushed himself down onto Hannibal's cock, letting it cut right through him, splitting him open like he was the man's next meal.

Hannibal watched in awe at the man who greedily took his cock inside him, his body undulated atop his lap. Hannibal stroked up and down Will's thigh, the soft hair contrasting the hard muscle that contracted and relaxed at a steady pace as he fucked himself on his cock. With a squeeze of his ass, he let his other hand roam upwards, slipping under the fabric of Will's shirt. He slid his fingers against the velvet plains of his abdomen, stopping occasionally to caress the softness of his stomach and the scar tissue. Will's moans punctuated his movements as he rode Hannibal, who pushed at his shirt. Will grabbed at Hannibal's biceps, gripping them for support. Panting, Hannibal pulled his hand back towards himself, popping the buttons of Will's flannel.

Will slowed the movement of his hips, grinding shallowly with a cheeky smirk. Hannibal caught a glimpse of mischief in the storm of his eyes, flashing like lightning, most people would miss it. Like Will, Hannibal was not most people.

"I'll buy you another," Hannibal's words ended in a breathy moan, Will having squeezed himself around Hannibal's cock.

"Will you now?" Will drawled, grunting as he pulled himself upwards, pulling away from Hannibal. His cock slid out of him with steady ease. Hannibal hissed at the sudden coldness. His hips bucked upwards, chasing after the wet heat of the other man.

"Yes," Hannibal breathed, "I want to bury myself inside you. I want to pry open your chest and crawl inside my new home. Even then, I will never be close enough to you." Hannibal watched as Will lowered himself back down, swiveling his hips as he let Hannibal's throbbing cock play with his rim. In one smooth motion, Will took Hannibal back inside of him entirely, moaning as he fell hard on his cock. Hannibal ran his hands up Will's chest, parting the shirt as best he could. Will shivered, clenching his ass as Hannibal's fingers brushed over a hard nipple.

Will stretched his entire body as he battered his insides on Hannibal's cock. He preened, nearly screaming as he hit a sensitive bundle of nerves deep inside. Hannibal studied Will as if he was a painting, having stretched back into the moonbeams falling through the window.

His neck and cheeks were rosy and pink. It was unclear if the red on his body was a blush or blood-stained skin. The ivory light made him appear paler, creating a greater contrast between his skin and the deep gash across his entire stomach. Hannibal gazed upon his own Saint Sebastian. How his skin glistened the more he sweat, making his skin glitter in the light. How his hair fell over his dark eyes, curls bouncing as he speared himself on Hannibal's cock. How his musky scent mingled with his own to create the pleasantly vulgar smell of sex.

The two fell into each other, both calling out each other's names in a mix of moans and wails. Their lips found each other in the messy kiss of a reunion. They devoured each other, absorbing the other to finally become one, just as God intended.

"Will!" Hannibal yelled his name like it was a prayer, speaking against his God's lips. Will let out breathy gasps and moans. His brow wrinkled as he moved himself up and down on Hannibal's twitching hips, the burn of his flexing thighs only enhancing his pleasure. His hands gripped Hannibal's biceps, slotting their lips together once as he climaxed atop him, tugging Hannibal into salvation with him as he came, his pearly cum joining the fresh blood stains of Hannibal's cashmere sweater.

Will fell limp into Hannibal's arms, who lifted them out of the leather chair and with shaking legs, plopped them both down on the fainting couch. Will let out a soft huff, wrapping his arms around Hannibal's neck, and pulling him close. Hannibal nipped at his skin and buried his nose into his shoulder. He inhaled his scent deeply, tasting the sweat on his tongue as he thrust his hips into him, chasing his promise of deliverance.

Will writhed under him, whimpering as Hannibal fucked into him, his bloody, weeping abdomen rubbed against his overstimulated, spent cock.

"Hannibal!" He yelled, the man grunted into his neck, biting his sweaty skin as he came.

The two lay there together in the room, sullied with blood, sweat, and alcohol. Hannibal plopped to Will's side, catching his breath as his cock slid out of Will's dripping hole, red and abused.

Their heads fell together, panting into each other's mouths. One's exhale became the other's inhale. Will ran his hands up and down Hannibal's soft sweater, his fingers lingering over the bloody handprints, an amused smile on his face. Hannibal touched the red of Will’s neck, bruised by his teeth and hands. He pushed Will's sweaty, tangled curls out of his face.

"I'm certain the strongest muscle is the human tongue," Hannibal hummed in contentment, smugness radiating from his being. With a scoff, Will continued to run his hands down Hannibal's body, caressing the skin. Until he reached his abdomen.

Will dipped his fingers in the bloody mess of Hannibal's reopened wound, eliciting a sharp inhale from the older man. Will coated his fingers in the fresh blood and painted strokes across the plane of his stomach in his own blood. His smile dropped from his face, staring down at the bloody hole as if it was an offense to the world.

Breathing through the pain that began to overpower the endorphins, Hannibal gazed upon Will's pouting face. He was silent for a few moments as he reached into the back of his mind, entering the doors of his mind palace and strolling inside. Finding what he wanted, he returned, his eyes blinking open.

"The Greeks believed that Priam and Hecuba, the King and Queen of Troy had nineteen children. One of whom they named Cassandra." Will shoved his fingers deeper into Hannibal's wound, his lip curling in disgust. He scratched his nails against the raw insides of his wound. Hannibal continued, his breath only hitching as Will corkscrewed his fingers deeper, clawing at his tender flesh.

"She was also known as Alexandra. Sasha is a lovely diminutive of the name."

Will propped himself up, pulling his hand from the mark Cassandra had left on Hannibal and pressing it down into his chest. He stared at him with his mouth agape, his heart thumping calmly beneath his hand. Hannibal smiled, his canines glimmering in the silver moonlight that embellished the office.

"She will live on. But, do not fret, my Sweet William. She will live on as our dog,"

Will burst out in a fit of laughter, falling to lie flat on his back while Hannibal was on his side, facing him as he looked up to the shadows dancing around the ceiling. As his chortles began to die down, he continued to stare above him, the storm clouds clearing from his eyes. He reached up towards the dark of the ceiling, his fingers flexing as he stretched out his entire arm. Hannibal brought his hand up to Will's, lacing their fingers together.

"You are Apollo, having flayed Marsyas alive. Just to call out to me," Hannibal's voice was sweet, his eyes graced by the sight before him. Will smiled at the comparison, but his brow only pinched again. He swiveled his head to the side, his eyes catching sight of a small booklet atop Hannibal's desk. Sitting right next to where he had left the cooler.

Will's eyes widened, perking up as he read the title.

He brought Hannibal's hand to his lips, kissing the back of it before letting go and sitting up.

Will's joints popped as he stood, something warm dripping down the back of his thigh. He felt Hannibal's eyes burn into his back like a brand. It was a welcome heat. He smirked, swinging his hips, more dramatically than naturally, as he approached the desk. He sidestepped the wine to not step in broken glass with bare feet.

He picked up the book, eyes lingering over the cover.

The Language and Sentiment of Flowers

Flipping open the book to the bookmarked page, the pinch in his brow softened. He took in a shaky breath, opening his mouth to read.

"These flowers are historically gifted to honor the gallantry and bravery of the receiver. Colloquially known as Sweet Williams, Dianthus Barbatus signifies gallantry, grace, and love."

Will looked up at Hannibal, whose eyes glowed red in the shadows of the room.

At that moment, he understood.

He set the book down with a gentle touch. He rounded the desk, his fingers dancing atop the cooler.

"Sex leaves a man famished, Doctor Lecter," He made extra care to draw out Hannibal's name, the southern charm flowing down his tongue like honey. He tapped the top of the container knocking a simple rhythm while the other hand beckoned Hannibal with a bloodied finger.

Hannibal peeled himself up from the couch, the shadows around his eyes darkening. Will opened the cooler, the smoke of dry ice pouring out from the sides, covering the desk in a fog.

"You should be ashamed," Will teased, reaching into the cooler. Hannibal raised a brow, his dark eyes glinting with amusement. "You left before we could have our most anticipated meal. It was going to be our grand finale."

Will held an airtight, freezer bag. Sealed inside was a slice of something pink and wrinkled,

"I was so disappointed. I've never had pig's brain," Will pouted, looking at Hannibal through his lashes with wide eyes.

Hannibal walked around the table, joining Will on the other side. He placed one hand on Will's shoulder and the other on his bare hip. He leaned forward to nip at his earlobe. He then murmured in low timber, "we will need fresh ingredients for the side dishes. How do you feel about throwing a grand dinner party?"

Will whipped his head to the side, meeting Hannibal's eyes. The two shared an identical, shark-toothed smile.

The forest floor was littered with leaves buried under heaps of snow. The trees that had once given them life were now dead branches swaying the crisp air of winter. The snow had not melted, obscuring the leaves from view. The crystals were bound in immaculate and brilliant heaps. A perfect canvas.

Bright red splattered across the pile of snow and ice. The skin of the man that lay atop it was so pale it almost blended into the glowing white backdrop. His dark black hair splayed around his head like a halo in the lap of the second man. His body was thrown across the pale man’s, and his face was frozen in a twisted mask of agony.

The two men were draped in a red cloth held up by the shoulders of the man stuck in his eternal lament. His head was pushed back, his eyes pried open and glued to the tops of his sockets. He gazed up at the heavens in his molded anguish. While one arm was wrapped around the paler man, his other hand reached out behind him, as if he was stopping others from approaching. Refusing to

let them come any closer in his vulnerable moment. But there was no one else. Just their staged corpses in snow surrounded by an audience of trees.

He had color on his face, his tanned skin clothed in a single sheet that hid the incision low on his stomach. His hand on the other corpse's waist hid the opening from which the pale man’s kidneys had been stolen.

The dark-haired lover’s mouth was agape, parchment stuffed down his throat.

At their feet lay discarded armor and weapons, tossed without care besides their lifeless bodies. As the sun climbed higher in the sky, the snow began to melt. Pink streams of gore-tinted water soaked back into the dark earth as if it had never been there. Although their icy stage began to dissipate into the ground, Achilles still threw his body across Patroclus, eternally mourning his death. Unconsolable. Alone. For the two only had each other. But, even in death, they would prevail.

It’s been said that God enjoys killing. This can be a hard truth to see if one is not acquainted with the macabre. Those who have not seen a man gnaw on the flesh and bone of another are not able to accept this solution. But those who have used a vein as their inkwell and have dragged a bloody brush across a perfect canvas know the power that only a god could hold. The ferocity only a god would dare to use.

Upon defiling their enemies in bloodshed, Achilles and Patroclus etched their names into the fabric of history. With a force akin to the violence of a thunderstorm. Like the original Renaissance, nature can annihilate and create in the same stroke of one, single breath.

So too can man. But only those born of nature yet self-molded into something more. Something unnatural.

Mortal gods.

Fin.

Chapter End Notes

An additional thank you <3 <3 <3

Love you all... see you around the epilogue?

Caryophyllaceae

Chapter Notes

Welcome back!

First, a huge thank you to The_Grey_Lady_Weeps for being my beta reader and the beautiful fanart. Another thank you to h0neybeebear for editing parts of this chapter as well! Please go check out their work! Both are phenomenal writers who I respect very much.

And a big thank you, to you. Yes, you. I am so appreciative for all the love you've given me and my brain baby. I can't believe we're here already. Yes, I'm going to cry. It's been a wild ride, my friends.

So for the last time, without further ado…

Happy reading! I sincerely hope you enjoy it just as I have.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The key-ring clattered as it fell, hitting the ground with a thud. A chorus of barking erupted from inside the house. Will smiled at the sound, adjusting the leather satchel slung over his shoulder as he bent over. He took the keys in his hands, the metal cool against his fingers. It was a comfort. He seemed to run hot these days.

Will stepped into the den, the wood underneath his boots creaking from his weight. The dogs greeted him, snuffling at his feet and legs, taking in all the scents he had acquired that day. He gave them enough love and affection from scratches and pets, and seemed to calm down after having successfully greeted their father. His attention was brought to the chair next to the fireplace with a space heater.

A light was on next to the sitting chair. In it was a broad shouldered man with a dog strewn across his lap. His suit jacket was draped behind him, the sky blue a beacon of light against the dark, muted colors of the room. The reading lamp shone down on him, giving his blonde hair the hue of raw honey that clings to the side of the jar, crystalized and preserved and waiting for the consumer to delight in its sweetness.

"I didn't see your car." Will did not take his boots off as he walked over to where Hannibal sat.

"I parked it around back," Hannibal tilted his head, folding the book in his lap closed with a finger to bookmark the page, "For old time's sake of course," Sasha nuzzled her head into Hannibal's lap, her eyes closed. He stroked her head and gave a little scratch behind the ears. She settled back down, taking in a long inhale through her twitching nose and releasing it in a burst of air.

"What are you reading?" Will took a step, but was interrupted by a soft growl. Sasha's eyes were instantly open and alert, staring at Will with her large brown eyes. She continued to growl, but her tail continued to wag, slapping the armrest with a constant thud.

"She's trained to not let guests walk on the carpets with their shoes." Hannibal said calmly as he resumed his reading. The book he held in front of his face hid his curling lips, but it could not hide the glimmer in his eyes.

"I'm not a guest, Hannibal," he griped, the northern accent heavy on his palate. It made his jaw tense as his tongue stumbled over the stilted, staccato of the words. Hannibal sighed, the glimmer in his eyes extinguished like coals buried in wet soil.

"I do miss the dulcet tones of your beautiful voice, my sweet William."

"You know damn well it's just for you. E'eryone else can go straight on down to Hell," Will said, letting his mouth turn back to his most comfortable state. His tongue felt looser in his mouth, the most powerful muscle in the body let free from its cage. Will slipped off his boots and the growling ceased. He let his satchel fall off his shoulder and drop to the ground before sauntering around the back of the armchair.

He leaned down to kiss Hannibal on the cheek, his hand immediately reaching for his lower abdomen.

"What are you doing here?" Will popped his neck, rolling his shoulders back. He hovered over Hannibal, pressing his nose into his slicked back hair. He inhaled deeply, the aroma of his hair gel that did not have a ship on the bottle seeping into his pores as he took in his scent, the aroma a comforting welcome. Will's eyes fluttered shut, Hannibal's hair tickling his mouth and nose as he buried himself in it, pressing his lips to his scalp with a kiss as he mussed it around.

"Uncle Jack visited me today." Will's eyes snapped open, greeted with the dirty blonde blur of Hannibal's hair in his eyes. With another kiss to his head, Will pulled away, running a hand through the head of hair he intended to mess up.

"Is he investigating you? Retracing the last steps of Miriam Lass?" Will hummed the former FBI trainee's name as if it was just the melody of an aria. Still, his heart was rabbiting in his chest. Hannibal was sure to have felt it in their shared touch. If not, he would smell the concern as it began to pour from Will's pores. Though if he did, it would be tinged with something sickly. All of Will's scents had become such as of late.

Hannibal shut his book with his finger tucked in the pages, allowing Will to read the cover, leaning over the back of the chair..

"'Empathy disorders,'" Will read aloud, his voice hushed.

"I am meeting a new patient tomorrow." Hannibal handed the book to Will, holding it over his shoulder. The other man took it, minding to keep Hannibal's place. He thumbed through the table of contents, skimming the topics.

"I was sought out to give a temporary agent of the FBI a psychological evaluation. Uncle Jack thinks that you are a fragile teacup," Hannibal revealed, using his free hands to attend to Sasha thoroughly, petting and scratching her in all the right places. She rolled over in his lap, her single front paw tucked to her chest.

"Psychological evaluation, my ass," Will huffed and did not hand the book back to Hannibal, who busied himself with the task of giving Sasha a belly rub. Will rounded the chair, petting Sasha

gently on the head. She snuffled, licked his arm a couple times, and pulled away from Hannibal, squirming off of his lap. She and the other dogs gathered around Will, sniffing him curiously.

"They must smell dinner. Even through the antiseptic and formaldehyde. What magnificent creatures." A beat of silence followed as Will stared down at the book in his hands. Hannibal looked up, his ever calculating eyes glimmering in the warmth of lamp light.

"So, Dr. Lecter and Professor Graham are meetin' tomorrow?" Will outstretched his arm towards Hannibal, the book in his hand.

"In Jack's office, yes," Hannibal confirmed, taking the other end of the book, but Will did not let go. Both held onto either end of the book, staring into each other's eyes with incomparable intensity. Will leaned down at the waist, his lips brushing Hannibal's sharp cheekbone.

"Well Doctor, it'll be very nice to meet you," Will purred in his ear and tapped him on the shoulder, his hand reaching into his own pocket.

"The pleasure will be all mine. Do not forget your glasses, Professor," Hannibal teased back, finally taking the book back from Will, who was already on the move, shoving his feet into Hannibal's slippers that sat next to the couch. He padded towards the front door, not bothering to pick up his bag off the floor.

"Come on. I need a smoke," Will announced as he walked to the front patio. Hannibal followed him without a word.

The bright spark was a warm light against the cold navy of the night sky. The patio floor creaked under Will's feet. Hannibal took care to slip on the second pair of slippers by the door before joining Will at the railing.

"Damn it," Will cursed, the cigarette between his lips. He handed the lighter to Hannibal. "Help me, would you? This damn thing is actin' up again. Makin' a big ol' fuss outta nothin'." Hannibal's lips curled into a smile. He took the lighter into his hand, thumb flicking the small gear of the lighter. It lit on the first try.

"There we are," he hummed, the vibrations deep in his chest.

"Come 'ere," Will mumbled with a roll of his eyes. He grabbed Hannibal by the wrist, inhaling deeply as the flame ignited the end of the rolled paper and tobacco. He let his eyes stay open, staring into the eyes of the man before him, shining like rubies in the firelight. Hannibal reached to take the glasses off of Will's face as he began to smoke.

Will pulled the cigarette from his mouth, the white clouds trailing out from his lips as he pulled Hannibal in for a smoky kiss. The fire from the lighter burned hot on his exposed wrist. He grabbed Hannibal by the jaw. He let their tongues touch for a moment, before pulling away and turning to lean over the patio railing. He wrapped his lips around the cigarette head as Hannibal joined him at the edge. They looked out into the dark of the night, gazing at whatever it was that they could not see.

"How do you wanna play this?" Will broke the silence after another drag, the smoke strolling lazily up towards the stars in the sky.

"Jack does not know about us. Otherwise, he would not have asked me to evaluate you," Hannibal pointed out, their voices quiet, but loud in the emptiness of the property.

"Did he say how he found you?" Will asked as he flicked the cigarette butt, the ashes falling off the end.

"Alana." Her name rolled easily off of Hannibal's lips. Will threw his not quite finished cigarette to his feet, a grunt of disapproval caught in his throat. He stomped it out, twisting the ball of his foot into the treated wood.

"Fuckin' Alana." Will pulled another cigarette from the box and shoved it back into his pocket. An owl screeched in the distance and the old patio floor creaked under their feet.

" She never heard about you from me," Hannibal countered.

"You don't have to tell me that," Will grumbled through lips clamped around the fresh cigarette. He leaned forward towards Hannibal, who flicked the lighter alive again. The wind picked up, the flame dancing in the cool breeze. It licked at Hannibal's thumb as he lit Will's cigarette, but he did not extinguish it. He held it open a moment too long after the rolling paper caught fire, watching the flame cast the planes of Will's face in sharp relief and ignoring the way it burned his skin.

"You've met her?" Hannibal said, blinking in the darkness as he finally extinguished the flame. His hand brushed Will's hip as he slipped the lighter into the pocket of his ill-fitting slacks. Will leaned forward, his elbows pressed into the cold wood of the railing.

"She's a visitin' professor, sha." Will took another drag. "She thinks I'm avoidin' her 'cause I don't want her diggin' into my head."

"Little does she know how happy you'd be to dig into hers." He earned a smile out of Will, whose lips curved upwards from a disgusted frown.

"Only if you are the one to prepare it," Will snorted, smoke puffing out of his nose. He leaned into Hannibal's touch that had lingered.

"A very special meal for you." Hannibal's hand traced up Will's back, a single finger following the curve of his spine. Will arched his back into the touch, throwing his head back with a crack.

"I wanna crush her skull," Will moaned. He rolled his shoulders that popped, the tension of the day melting away.

"Patience, my dear boy." Hannibal grasped Will's neck, pulling him off of the railing. Will clambering backwards into Hannibal's chest. His hand squeezed his neck, a warm breath in his ear. Will did not struggle. He simply turned his head to the side, eyes darting up and down to look at Hannibal.

"What does Jack want from you?" Will blew a cloud of smoke into Hannibal's face, the distraction enough for him to slip out of his grasp. He pivoted on his heel and took the cigarette butt to his lips, inhaling until it burned up to the filter.

"A psychoanalysis. It seems your mask is working well." Hannibal watched Will pace the porch as he thought.

"Too well.” Will said as he exhaled. “He thinks I'm about to break at any moment, doesn't he?" Will flicked the cigarette butt through the rungs lining the porch floor.

“Yes, he does.” Hannibal answered bluntly. “Leaving us with only one strategy for our game.” Will hung his head as he listened to Hannibal’s suggestion. “Professor Graham will balk at having a psychiatrist poking around his mind,” Hannibal said, as if the answer was as clear as day. “And I will show the utmost professional discretion in my analysis.” Will chortled in agreement. He glanced over his shoulder as they turned to go back inside, one question still on his tongue.

"You stayin’ for the night?"

"Where else would I go?"

"Tell me then, how many confessions?" Hannibal observed the board, leaning into look at the photos of the girls with his hands tucked in the pockets of his cream suit. His eyes followed the path of the strings, noting from which city each girl was taken.

"Twelve dozen the last time I checked. None of them had any details, until this morning, then they all had details," Jack Crawford replied as he sat down at his desk. His furrowed brow and bruised under-eyes were made prominent in the unforgiving fluorescent lighting of his office. Hannibal regarded him as he spoke, but did not turn around. He continued to observe Jack Crawford's tableau, curated to discover the killer of the girls with smiling faces pinned to the board. Without their bodies, the only memory of them was artificial, preserved in ink on glossy paper. Will’s eyes bored into his back.

"Some genius in Duluth PD took a photograph of Elise Nichols' body with his cell phone, shared it with his friends, and then Freddie Lounds posted it on Tattlecrime.com." He spoke the journalist's name as if it left a bitter taste in his mouth. Will shook his head, his movements choppy.

"Tasteless," Will muttered, his jaw clenching as he forced the accent out of his throat. He kept his eyes trained on a specific point on Jack Crawford's desk, vision obscured by the frame of his non-prescription glasses and decidedly not focused on the doctor perusing the evidence.

"Do you have trouble with taste?" Hannibal quipped back immediately, prompting Will to watch Hannibal turn away from the board in his peripheral vision. He squirmed in his seat, forcing his eyes downwards. A furrowing of the brow was an ever-present ornament on Professor Graham’s face and thus not cause for concern in the mind of the head of the department sitting between them.

"My thoughts are often not tasty." Will’s lips reared back into a grimace as he slouched further into the chair.

“Nor mine. No effective barriers.” Hannibal strolled over, hands still shoved in his pockets.

“I build forts,” Will bit out as he brought his coffee cup to his lips, his hands hotter than the lukewarm beverage. He cringed at the taste, but swallowed it down regardless.

“Associations come quickly.” The mug hid the edges of his lips that curled up in betrayal as Hannibal neared, riposting Will’s comment with ease.

“So do forts.” Hannibal sat beside him as Jack got up, his back to them at the board. With a drink of water in hand, he turned to the younger man, finally seeking a familiar sight. But Hannibal hesitated, blinking in rapid offense.

“Not fond of eye contact, are you?” he supplied, then promptly took a sip as Will began to sneer.

“Eyes are distracting, you see too much, you don't see enough” he snapped, his voice dripping with bitterness. He turned, keeping his gaze low and fixed on the other man’s lap. “And- And it's hard to focus when you're thinking–”

His eyes met Hannibal’s.

“-Um, ‘oh, those whites are really white, or, ‘he must have hepatitis’, or, ‘oh, is that a burst vein?’” The two leaned closer together as Will spoke. Hannibal chuckled, his dark eyes flickering down to regard his lips before meeting his guarded eyes once again. He could not suppress the gentle smile that turned the corners of his mouth. “So, yeah, I try to avoid eyes whenever possible,” Will concluded lamely. He looked away, blinking and squeezing his eyes shut for a few seconds.

“Jack?” Will called, flipping through the file on the desk.

“Yes?” the man in question answered, sitting back down.

“I imagine what you see and learn touches everything else in your mind.” Will turned to Hannibal as he began his analysis without warning. Hannibal met his staring eyes, but continued without hesitation, “your values and decency are present, yet shocked at your associations, appalled at your dreams. No forts in the bone arena of your skull for things you love.”

The bags under Will’s eyes wrinkled and his eyebrows came together in consternation.

“Whose profile are you working on? Whose profile is he working on?” The venom-soaked words flew from his lips as if they were burning a hole in his tongue. He was met with Jack’s unimpressed stare, eyebrows raised in tired obstinance.

“I'm sorry, Will–” The nickname stalled in his mouth. He continued as if nothing happened. “Observing is what we do. I can't shut mine off any more than you can shut yours off.” Hannibal was reaching for a sip of water before he had even finished speaking.

“Please, don't psychoanalyze me. You won't like me when I'm psychoanalyzed,” Will threatened, each word a staccato beat. He kept his eyes away from Hannibal entirely.

“Will,” Jack pleaded with tired eyes.

“Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go give a lecture-” Will stood as Hannibal turned to him again, grabbing his coat off of the chairback, “on psychoanalyzing.” Will rushed out of the room, leaving Hannibal to stare ahead in between Jack and the board.

“Maybe we shouldn't poke him like that, Doctor,” Jack advised. He fiddled with his pen. “Perhaps a less, uh, direct approach.”

“What he has is pure empathy.” Hannibal pressed his fingers together, leaning forward in his seat. “He can assume your point of view, or mine, and maybe some other points of view that scare him. It's an uncomfortable gift, Jack.” Jack hummed in agreement, pensive as he considered the good Doctor's diagnosis.

“Perception's a tool that's pointed on both ends.” Hannibal looked back up at the board, narrowing his eyes. A plan seemed to formulate in his mind the longer he looked. “This cannibal you have him getting to know...” His lips twitched at the sacred word, eyes aflame in delight. “I think I can help good Will see his face.”

Will tore his glasses off of his face as he climbed onto Hannibal's front porch, rubbed his eyes with the back of his hands, feeling the all too familiar aura of a migraine coming on. Hannibal would have strong painkillers. It was important for people in his line of work to keep that type of medication on hand.

He fished for the keys blindly within his coat pocket, squeezing his eyes shut. He felt like his skull was shrinking in on him, crushing his brain like it was its own personal straitjacket. Will shoved the key into the lock, opening the door unceremoniously. He did not announce his arrival, moving straight to the kitchen in his blindness. He wrapped his fingers around the fridge handle and pulled it open, only opening his eyes enough to allow him to peek inside.

He grabbed a random tupperware container and ripped it open, grabbing a fork from the nearby drawer. He started shoveling the cold leftovers into his mouth before the utensil drawer slammed shut properly. He let his eyes fall shut again as he dug into the food and threw his head back. A low moan erupted from his throat as he ate.

His eyes shot open as he heard a doorway creak, causing his headache to flare like a nail being pressed into a wound. Hannibal emerged from the dark staircase that led to the basement. Will stared at Hannibal as he chewed lazily, his eyes drooping in exhaustion.

"What?" Will grunted, shoveling refrigerated leftovers into his mouth, his eyes defensive. Hannibal simply watched, smiling when he tilted his head.

"Those are leftovers. The least you can do to assuage my poor heart is to let me warm them up."

"So you've just come on up here to judge my choice of food, is that right, darlin'?"

"No, *darling* , this is not about your eating skills, even if they need to be reevaluated." The void in Hannibal’s eyes called out to Will, pulling him closer to the edge. Sucking him down into the all too familiar abyss. The soft crinkle of the plastic suit explained the rest. Stuffing the rest of the food into his mouth, Will set the tupperware in the sink and took Hannibal's gloved hand, following him downstairs.

"I believe I can help you see this killer's true face. A game, of sorts," Hannibal offered, the corners of his lips turning up. Will rolled his eyes.

"Last time we played a game, you cheated," he deadpanned, his drawl thick as he thumped down the stairs, his footsteps heavy with his clunky workman's boots. The wooden steps creaked under his feet, but not Hannibal's. Despite being taller and broader than Will, he had always been lighter on his feet.

"I promise you, this time I will be a much better sport." Hannibal flicked on the basement light, the yellow light illuminating a surgeon's table. A body lay atop it. Not unusual. She was still breathing. Unusual. Will tilted his head at the sight.

"What are you doing, Hannibal?" Will turned to his partner, eyes narrowing as he attempted to calculate the situation running on leftovers, aspirin, and a lack of sleep. He rubbed his hand on the back of his neck, trying to relieve the tension of his headache, only finding his nape damp with sweat.

"You are having an issue seeing this cannibal Uncle Jack is having you get to know. So," Hannibal gestured towards the young girl restrained on the table, "Tell me what he *wouldn't* do,"

Will's cheeks wrinkled as he smiled. He walked past Hannibal and towards the girl on the table. Her wind-chafed skin glowed like the surface of the moon underneath the fluorescent light of the basement. He stalked around the surgeon's table. Beside it, was a sanitized cart that glinted with steel surgical tools. He ran his knuckle across the edge of the table, the cool surface refreshing against his burning hot skin.

Hannibal followed him after a few moments, watching Will's back enveloped in shadows as he stepped directly under the light. As he approached, Will did not move from his spot, staring at the girl's peaceful face, the IV stuck into her arm pumping her with sedatives. Will looked up at Hannibal across the table. He picked up a scalpel in his gloved hands, the plastic suit squeaking as he moved.

Just as Hannibal had donned his person-suit, Will's eyes glazed over as he donned a mask recreated from the reflection of the mirrors in his mind.

"Wake her up. He wouldn't want her to feel pain. He wouldn't want it to be a quick kill."

"As you wish." He unhooked the IV bag from the pole from which it hung and set it down, carefully guiding the needle out of the girl's vein.

"What else would he not do?"

"He wouldn't mount her. Or mock her. He loves her, but he does not love her sexually."

Hannibal brought the scalpel to her sternum, slicing open the pale flesh. Rivulets of blood poured forth, staining her pallid skin. Will did not flinch as the girl's eyes shot open, a shriek landing like a lash against his back. Her wet screams were muffled, silenced by the fabric stuffed in her mouth. She would not stop. It was the only sound in the room. Will eventually began to twitch at the girl screaming in his face. He looked up to Hannibal, as her rib-cage was still intact, her lungs still ballooning her bloody bodice as she worked up the energy to wail again. When he found Hannibal's eyes, the twitching from the offensive noise stopped.

"He wouldn't," Will paused, his voice faltering as if something had slammed into his chest. "He wouldn't take out her lungs while she was alive." Will's tone became harsher, his words beating with a staccato as precise as the incisions. Hannibal's eyes glimmered under the fluorescent lights.

Without another word, he fixed the latex of the glove, covering a bit of skin that had peaked out. He grabbed a scalpel from the table of instruments. Will shifted himself out of the way, walking as if he was floating through the air. He stopped at the head of the table. He looked down, studying the girl's pale skin, translucent under the light.

Hannibal pressed the tip of the blade to the top of her sternum, just below her collarbone. He pressed down, blood peeking through the skin. He cast a glance up at Will, who he found staring at the blood that had begun to pool. Hannibal sliced through the epidermis and deeper into the dermis, his forefinger pressing into the dull edge of the blade. He dragged it down slowly, the skin parting ways with each other as one piece became two. Hannibal and Will exhaled at the same time as the scalpel lifted from the fresh incision. The air in the basement was cold and smelt of blood. Hannibal made another incision horizontally, making it easier to pull back the flaps of skin like they were patio doors.

But Hannibal paused, the scalpel hovering over the intercostal muscles of her exposed ribcage. Red eyes gleamed with adoration, wide and magnificent, burning like hot coals, eager to devour whatever was placed atop them in flames.

"I said," Will commanded, "Cut out her lungs. She's lost the privilege of having them." At the order, Hannibal's knees bent under him. He steadied himself, a bloody handprint smeared across the metal surgeon's table as he caught his balance. He turned on the suction and inserted the tube next to her diaphragm. The bone saw came to life with a scream more preferable to the girl's own. Her head lolled to the side as the spinning metal saw hit bone, slicing through her sternum like hot butter. Will grabbed the girl by the sides of her head, forcing her teary eyes to look up at him. He brushed her dark hair out of her fluttering lids. Her lips trembled around the gag, half-lidded as she threatened to fall into the safety of the unconscious. Hannibal held the saw steady only for a few moments before there was a clean snap, loud in the small room. Hannibal set down the saw and pried open the armor of bone that guarded her organs.

The screaming finally stopped and her eyes rolled back in her head. Cassie Boyle's lungs seized in her chest as the pressure in the room pressed on her lungs. They would not inflate. The girl's heartbeat beat erratically, the sound dancing around the room in a frantic waltz. Will stepped away from his place at the head of the table, grabbing a glove off of the table and sliding it on. He halted Hannibal with a hand on his plastic-covered forearm. He pushed his arm down, forcing him to set the scalpel down. Will dipped his fingers into the blood that had not been picked up by the suction, coating his latex-clad fingers in the dark red nectar. He brought his fingers coated in Cassie Boyle's blood to Hannibal's mouth, and smeared it across his thin, angular lips, painting them as if her blood was a lipstick. Satisfied, Will plunged his fingers into Hannibal's mouth, feeding him the remaining blood.

"Suck them clean," he murmured, lips pressed against Hannibal's cheek. The wet sound of slurping accompanied the mechanical whirring of the suction tool as Hannibal suckled the blood from Will's fingers. He took Will's forefinger and middle finger deep into his mouth, his fingertips pressing down on the flat, flexing surface of the back of his tongue. Will pulled his fingers out of Hannibal's mouth abruptly with a wet pop. Hannibal's breathing was shallow, his wrist limp as Will pinned it to the table next to the other surgical instruments.

"Now." Hannibal's eyes trailed Will as he strolled across the table as if nothing had happened. "You can take her lungs now. Hurry, now. She has to be alive." Will reached forward, his hand breaching Cassie Boyle's exposed chest cavity. He traced a gloved finger over the ridges of her exposed trachea, dragging downwards towards her heart nestled between her two pink lungs. The girl's body

was trembling underneath him, her body overloaded with so much pain one would wonder if she could even feel it now. Her head had rolled to the side, eyes shut as she had surrendered to unconsciousness.

Will's finger traced the structure of her anatomy, following the trachea down to the thick aorta with a feather-light touch, feeling the thin layers of tissue. It surrendered to his fingertips, squishing as he applied pressure to the great artery. He held his breath as her heart thumped slowly under his finger. The pulse was strong but slowed with each passing minute. The color of her lungs was pink like the blushing sky and glistened with wet, shiny mucous. A pair of hands joined his own in the arena of a dying woman's chest.

Hannibal’s hands moved with a practiced ease, making cuts with the scalpel as if it was an extension of his body. An extra limb. First, the blade pressed into the mucous membranes, which squelched as they were cut through like jello, then, carving through the smooth muscle. His scalpel came to a stop as he hit the cartilage structure of the tubes. Hannibal sawed the scalpel blade through it. Back and forth. Back and forth. Back and forth-- *snap.*

Cassie Boyle’s eyes blinked open, her mouth wide as she tried to take a deep breath. Her functioning lung, the smaller of the two, only seized. Will caressed her beating heart in his hand as she tried to scream, but only a strangled wheeze left her lips. Hannibal removed the severed organ and placed it in a metal surgical bowl that sat on ice. Turning back to the body on the table, Hannibal picked up his scalpel, but by the blade. Hannibal handed it to Will, who took it from him without hesitation.

Will mirrored Hannibal's moves, removing the other. Underneath them, the girl's heart slowed in its beating, seizing as the waste had nowhere to filter out of her blood. Her mouth gaped open as she suffocated slowly, her eyes fluttering closed. Without oxygen, her brain and her other organs soon followed, shutting down as the carbon dioxide accumulated in her blood, waste pumping into every organ in her body. She would die in silent agony.

Will’s fingertips lingered as he placed the still warm, twitching organ in Hannibal's hands. Will took a breath, his fingertips grazing Hannibal’s as they held Cassie Boyle’s lung in their hands, an offering both divine and virtuous.

“ *This* ,” Will rasped, wetting his lips with a flick of his tongue. “This is my design.”

Will peeled himself out from the warm bed to let Hannibal into his motel room as the sun was rising, just as they had agreed the day before. He grabbed the bottle of aspirin off the dining table, swallowing them dry as Hannibal unpacked their breakfast. Hannibal frowned at the sight of Will eating the pills like candy.

"What?" Will groaned as he peeled off his white, sweat-soaked t-shirt and threw it in the trash can beside the bed with rumpled covers. He zipped open his duffel bag that sat on the empty side and grabbed another shirt, throwing the bag on the floor.

"Are you feeling ill?" Hannibal walked the length of the room briskly, pulling Will into an embrace. He took the fresh shirt out of his hands and placed it on the bed. He placed his hand on Will's

forehead, the other running down his chest, sticky with sweat.

"You've had this headache for days. You're warm, as well. Have you been able to sleep?" he inquired as his hands roamed Will's body, his fingers stalling to admire the white scar tissue that ran across his abdomen.

"I'm fine, just the case," Will grunted, gesturing to the black out curtains. "Those have been helping." Hannibal frowned, but gathered Will's t-shirt from the bed. He pulled it over Will's head, careful not to mess up already sleep-ruffled his head of curls.

"You can sleep here with me tonight if playing Doctor makes you feel better," Will said with a light smile that did not reach his eyes. Hannibal placed a soft kiss to Will's hairline, taking him by the hand and guiding him back to the table.

"Come, you will need something to fill your stomach if you've been taking medication." His fingers lingered over Will's bare ring finger.

"Hush." Will pushed at Hannibal's chest lightly, chastising him even though he hadn't said a thing. He didn't have to. "You've marked me in other ways no one else can,"

"I know. Still, it would be nice." They sat down at the table at the same time.

"It would."

"You forgot these at home," Hannibal said as he reached into his bag of tupperware. He placed two matching mugs on the table. Will let out a hearty laugh, leaning backwards in his seat as the absurd humor of the situation settled on him. Hannibal smiled brightly, his canines flashing in the paltry light as he twisted the thermos open, pouring the coffee into the mugs.

"What did Uncle Jack think of the display?"

"I told him he should ask you for your opinion," Will huffed, the laugh still coming out of his nose as he shoveled the breakfast into his mouth. He grabbed his mug, tapping his to Hannibal's matching one. "It's delicious, thank you." He took a sip of the coffee, washing down the human sausage. "Didn't know you could eat lungs."

"It is quite the work to prepare. As you can imagine, the most arduous part is just the removal of stale air."

"Very symbolic, I'd imagine. Ancient medicine believed that it was bad air that caused illness. Like you were squeezing the rude out of her lungs."

"Should I apply these practices? How would you suppose I should push the bad air out of you?"

"I can think of a few ways you can take my breath away." Will twirled his fork in his fingers, staring at Hannibal as he stuck the tines into a piece of sausage. He stuffed it in his mouth and chewed slowly, swallowing thickly. He never let his eyes leave Hannibal's.

"Finish you breakfast, my sweet William. We have a long day ahead of us. Thankfully, Jack is disposed in court." Hannibal took a sip of his coffee. "Today, it is just you and I."

"What fun we shall have."

Neither man flinched as they watched Garret Jacob Hobbs throw his exsanguinating wife onto the concrete porch. Will pushed himself in front of Hannibal, and drew his gun. He threw him a look, eyes flashing with intrigue.

"Stay here," he whispered, his gun aimed in front of him as he knocked open the door, training and primal instincts taking over. He heard struggling and crying from down the hallway. He advanced steadily, rounding the corner just as the man slid the knife across his daughter's bird-like neck. He aimed and pulled the trigger, shooting the man twice in the chest. Familiar footsteps follow him down the hallway, the cool Minnesota air flooding into the house. He looked down at the young girl. He did not kneel, nor did he place his hands over her bleeding neck.

She stared up at him, her eyes just as blue as his own, tears gushing down her pale, freckled face. The familiar heat of Hannibal's body soon arrived beside him. With a glint of amusement in his eyes, Hannibal looked to Will. Will stared down at the scene before him, gun at his side. A dead father next to his dying daughter, who choked on her own blood. He changed the posture of his tongue in his mouth.

"What did you do?" he demanded, harsh French jabbing at Hannibal like an icicle to the chest. The warmth of Hannibal's smile melted it. He met the drawn out syllables with a Parisian accent.

"I believe you may want to shoot him a few more times." Hannibal purred, ignoring the question. His eyes flitted to a dead Hobbs whose eyes were already glazing over, a smile on his dead lips. Will did not smile at Hannibal, instead pressing his lips together in a thin line. He glanced behind him, noticing the landline.

“You called the house,” he said, turning back around to shoot Hannibal a look, his eyes a cold steel blue. "If I shoot him, Jack will think I've gotten too close." Hannibal stared at him expectantly, just like he had the very first night they had met. Like a cat flicking its tail and ready to pounce. Will took a deep breath, the reality of the situation dawning on him. “And so he’ll have me evaluated. Psychiatrically.”

"Aren't you curious as to what would happen?" Hannibal observed Will's gaze as it flicked over to the trembling teenager, death's shadow looming over her. "How would the FBI's reality change if she lived or died? How would our reality change?"

Abigail choked on her own blood, her body twitching as she continued to bleed out on the kitchen floor. Her wild eyes danced between the two gods above her, chattering as if she was just a deer dying on the side of the road.

"Are you God or Mephistopheles?" Will pushed, his eyes lingering on Abigail a second longer than he had before. He reloaded his gun.

"I am both, just as you are." Hannibal followed Will's gaze this time, his brow twitching as he refused to furrow it. He buried his hand into his pocket. Will pivoted on his heel, shooting the fresh corpse eight more times in the chest. He slumped further against the cabinets.

"Heads we save her. Tails, we don't," Hannibal offered, procuring a coin from his wallet. Will took a step forward, holstering his gun. He took off his glasses with one hand and cupped Hannibal's cheek with the other, creating a bridge of their mutual gaze.

"And after all the dust has cleared," Will whispered, "we can settle down. Just the two of us forever, no one else around." Hannibal only smiled and flipped the coin into the air. Whether it was a tacit or ambiguous agreement, it never would have mattered anyway. The coin glinted high above their heads, rapidly spinning.

It was still in the air when Will lunged. He fell to his knees and placed a hand securely around the girl's throat. When the coin clattered to the floor, great silver wings shone in the early morning light.

The hallway was cold. Hospitals always seemed to be. Will didn't seem to notice as he stalked down the corridor. He moved like a ghost, passing by nurses and doctors that ran about effortlessly. His plaid shirt was rumpled, a dark gray jacket thrown over it. His face was free from glasses, revealing the full extent of where his furrowed brows met at the bridge of his nose. His short curls bounced against his wrinkled forehead as he hurried, steps hitting heavy and fast against the floor. He rounded the corner of the doorway.

Abigail Hobbs laid in the hospital bed. A large white bandage covered her neck, stark white against the dark hair that splayed out over the pillow and framed her face. Her eyes were shut, her face void of tension. As if she were in a peaceful dream, not comatose. She was not alone.

Hannibal sat next to her, his chin tucked into his chest as he slept. His large, tan hand sat atop hers, together in the unconscious world. Will's brow softened the longer he stared at the two.

Will took a seat facing him on the opposite side of the bed. He did not look at the hospital scrubs that made her look like a frail fawn. He did not look at the tubes hooked up to her, one taped into place over her mouth to breathe for her. He did not look at her face, still pasty and gaunt from blood loss despite the red bag handing beside her. He did not look at her. He stared straight ahead.

He watched Hannibal's chest rise and fall at a steady rate until the room shone with golden beams of light. The sun's fingers crept through the windows as it commenced its descent in the sky. A twinkle caught the corner of his eye.

Will stared at Hannibal just a moment longer. He basked in the comfort the man brought him, even in his sleep. He redirected his attention away from the man with a sigh.

A crystal vase filled with flowers sat on the end table next to the couch. It shimmered at the sun's delicate touch. The bouquet spilled over the lip of the vase, an abundance of red flecked with purple and white.

Will looked over at Hannibal with a tilt of his head and a question on his lips. He was still asleep. He crept to the other side of the bed and, taking care not to wake him, took Hannibal's jacket from where it hung. Will draped it over him. He glanced back over at the vase, a familiar color and shape catching his eye.

He approached the vase, fingers reaching out to brush against the petals. He found Sweet Williams first, of course. He took one from the vase, careful not to damage it or the others. He tucked one into his breast pocket. His fingers trailed to the dainty purple flowers, the tiniest of them all. Having become familiar with Hannibal's beloved book of flower language over the years, Will would not need it to decipher this message.

Blue Violets. *Faithfulness* .

Rosemary. *Remembrance* .

Dittany of Crete. *Birth* .

Pink Verbena. *Family union* .

American Cowslip. *You are my divinity* .

His hand halted at a flower as red as raw flesh. He stroked the soft petals with his fingertip.

Fascination. Bonds of affection. Pure, deep love.

"Carnation." Will turned at Hannibal's voice, his maroon eyes watching him with a lucidness so clear it was as if he hadn't been sleeping. "Its genus is also Dianthus, one you are familiar with," Hannibal said carefully.

"Meaning they are members of the same family: Caryophyllaceae," Will replied. His eyes flitted to the leaves interspersed throughout the bouquet.

Sorrel. *Parental affection.*

Will took a step towards Hannibal in the chair. They both looked at Abigail, as if one was the mirror reflection of the other.

"Hannibal," Will began after a moment of silence. "Did you give us a daughter?"

He grinned, sharp canines reflecting the light of the hospital room.

"My Sweet William, we are her fathers now."

Chapter End Notes

Always love hearing from you all. See you around?

<3

End Notes

Come say hi on tumblr!

@saint-hannibal

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!